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Robert Carse's Hobo Novelette

ARGOSY

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MAR. 10 WEEKLY

Jungle Girl

Amazing Adventure in Siam

by

H. Bedford-Jones

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SHE-(to herself) IF HE ONLY WEREN'T SO SKINNY AND WEAK I THINK HE WOULD BE MY MAN
HE-(to himself) I'M AFRAID I HAVEN'T A CHANCE WITH HER. IF I ONLY COULD GET HUSKY AND STRONG

SKINNY? NEW EASY WAY PUTS ON POUNDS—*FAST*

Thousands gaining 5 to 15 lbs. in a few weeks with new double tonic. Richest imported brewers' ale yeast concentrated 7 times and combined with iron

QUIT being held back by a skinny figure and a sickly, weak appearance that keep you from making friends. Here's a new easy treatment that is giving thousands solid, healthy flesh and new good looks—*in just a few weeks!*

As you know, doctors for years have prescribed yeast to build up health for rundown men and women. But now with this new discovery you can get far greater tonic results than with ordinary yeast—regain health, and in addition put on pounds of solid, husky flesh—*and in a far shorter time.*

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Concentrated 7 times

This amazing new product, Ironized Yeast, is made from specially cultured *brewers' ale yeast* imported from Europe—the richest yeast known—which by a new process is concentrated 7 times—*made 7 times more powerful.*

But that is not all! This marvelous, health-building yeast is then ironized with 3 kinds of iron.

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Results guaranteed

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Special FREE offer!

To start you building up your health *right away*, we make this absolutely FREE offer. Purchase a package of Ironized Yeast at once, cut out the seal on the box and mail it to us with a clipping of this paragraph. We will send you a fascinating new book on health, "New Facts About Your Body", by a well-known authority. Remember, results are guaranteed with the very first package—*or money refunded.* At all druggists. Ironized Yeast Co., Dept. 384, Atlanta, Ga.

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This magazine is on sale every Wednesday

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, Publisher, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK
WILLIAM T. DEWART, President RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary
MESSAGERIES HACHETTE PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE.,
3, La Belle Sauvage, Ludgate Hill, London, E.C.4 111 Rue Réaumur

Published weekly and copyright, 1934, by The Frank A. Munsey Company. Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, $4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; $7.00 to Canada; $7.00 to other foreign countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered. Entered as second class matter November 28, 1896, at the post office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879. The entire contents of this magazine are protected by copyright, and must not be reprinted without the publishers' permission. Title registered in U. S. Patent Office. Copyrighted in Great Britain.

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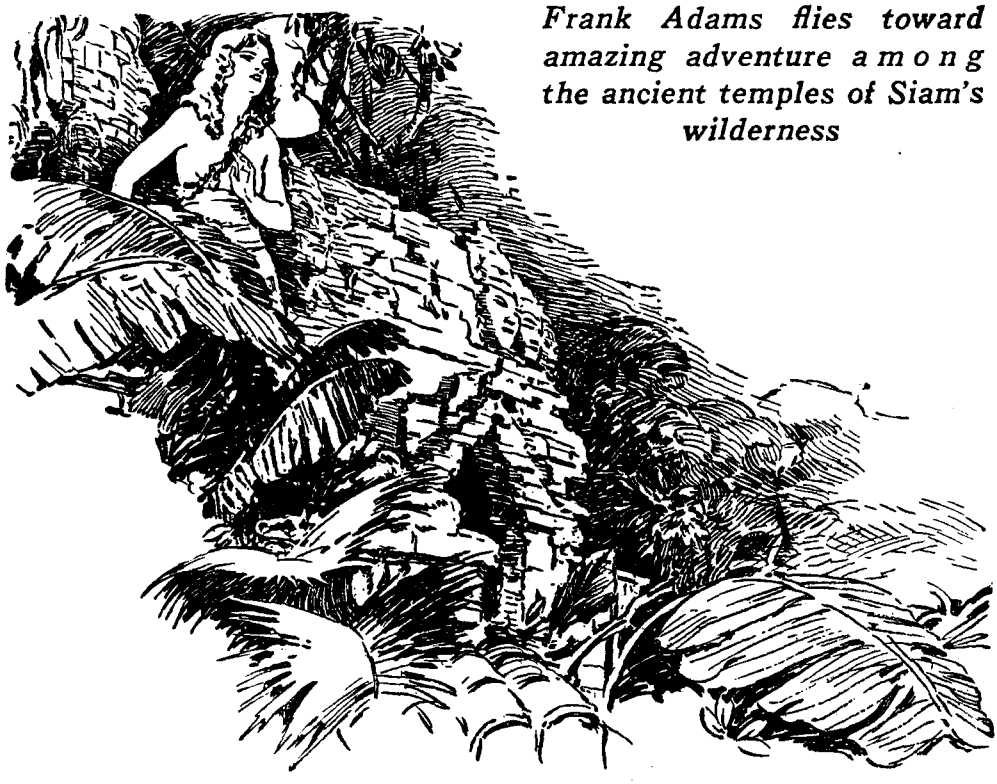
Jungle Girl

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Author of "Gallows Reef," "The Terror of Algiers," etc.



Frank Adams flies toward amazing adventure among the ancient temples of Siam's wilderness

CHAPTER I.

SOME DIE—SOME DO NOT!

I MEANT to make good or bust something trying—and, boy, I busted plenty!

Whenever I look back on my first twenty-four hours in Siam, I still go hot and cold. Hell is paved with good intentions, you know; and I admit freely that I, Frank Adams, meant well. That caused all the trouble.

I refuse to alibi, however. Let me state my faults briefly and comprehensively. I was twenty-four, I had knocked around a bit, and I just fit in nowhere. At last my father got tired of jerking me out of trouble. He shipped me off to Bangkok with a letter to my mother's brother, Colonel Kephard, who was established there.

All I knew about Uncle Frank, after whom I had been named, was that he supplied wild animals for the civilized market and was said to be a hell-buster. I had to make good with him or be finished, and I resolved to make good. Now we have the agony over and I can begin the astonishing story of my first twenty-four hours in Siam.

It was a full day. It had mighty little wasted time in it, let me admit.

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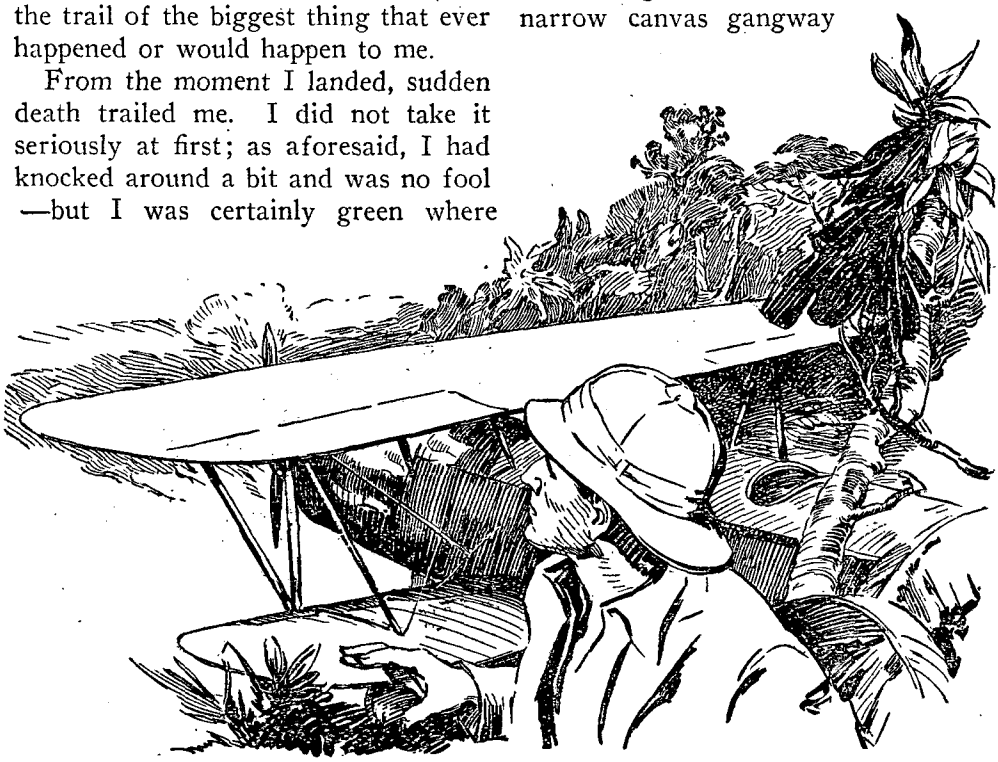
The Hokko Maru came up the river overnight and docked at seven in the morning; by seven next morning I had hit the high spots, turned Bangkok upside down, and was gone—gone far, wide and handsome. Also, I was on the trail of the biggest thing that ever happened or would happen to me.

From the moment I landed, sudden death trailed me. I did not take it seriously at first; as aforesaid, I had knocked around a bit and was no fool—but I was certainly green where Siam was concerned. And being a tenderfoot was, very likely, my salvation. Certainly I would have thought twice before tackling such a job, had I realized that the business of killing was not exaggerated. However, you now have my side of it, so let us proceed.

The Hokko Maru lined up against the wharf between river boats which were loading freight. The morning sunlight struck on the tops of temples and palaces far above the trees; Bangkok, that amazing combination of Oriental splendor and modern life, was in full swing for the day.

The wharf was a whirlpool of activity. Natives and coolies were hard at work. Cages of animals, huge piles of bananas, of rubber, of bamboos and sacked goods were all around, and through this welter a narrow canvas gangway was stretched up to the wharf shed for the use of the landing passengers.



Adams stared at the ruin in astonishment—there was a girl in the moonlight!

I shook hands with the half-dozen friends I had picked up aboard during the run from Manila and set off behind the two stewards who carried my luggage. They pattered on well ahead of me. I was halfway up the canvas when a coolie, working over a huge pile of bamboos within arm's length of me, uttered one appalling scream and jumped as though he had been shot—jumped right at me, fell across the ropes, and clutched at me.

The workers scattered. Voices went up in mad tumult—all repeating one

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word. "Cobra!" And there was the cobra among the bamboos, not three feet away from me, upreared, its hideous hood inflated, ready to strike a second time. Then, from every side, rushed in natives armed with bamboos. The reptile was beaten down, killed.

Then I realized that I had not moved—was standing there with a dying man clutching at my ankle. This was my greeting to Bangkok, my introduction to Siam. A grim omen, had I but regarded it as such.

A rickshaw landed me at the hotel I had elected; a spanking modern hotel, too. After getting settled and finding a bite to eat, I donned my new pith helmet, had the doorman get me a rickshaw, and set forth to call upon my Uncle Frank. His name was well known. His office and animal compound, I learned, was in the suburbs but on this side of the river.

When I reached it and saw merely a huge elephant stockade stretched off among trees, on either side of the office building with its faded sign in English and Tamil—"Frank R. Kephard, Animals"—I little dreamed how huge was the space enclosed. I walked into the office where two native clerks were at work, and asked for my uncle. One of the natives ushered me into the private office, and the fun was on.

Before the desk, and squaring away to face me, was my uncle. Burly, bearded, unkempt, massive in every detail, he shot me a savage look of inquiry.

"Well? Who are you?" he demanded.

"Adams is the name," I said cheerfully. "Frank Adams. Did you get the radiogram I sent you? I have a letter here—"

"So, it's you!" he ejaculated. Taking up a cheroot, he bit at it and leaned back in his chair, surveying me. Then he uttered a sniff and struck a match, holding it to his cheroot. "Well," he grunted, "what do you want?"

I PULLED up a chair, uninvited, and lit a cigarette.

"That's the question," I said. "You have, no doubt, heard from my father. I have certain wants, I admit. Chief of them is to make good, if you'll give me a chance."

Kephard sniffed in his huge beard.

"You're a fine big rascal," he observed. "Brawn and no brains, eh? So they send you out to me. Not good for a damned thing. A failure at home, and you come out here to make good—save the mark! Don't you know the government has closed up all the gambling houses? You expect to make good at soaking up all the whisky in Siam, I suppose?"

"You're an optimist, uncle," I returned, being resolved not to let him get under my skin. "That would be a large order. As a matter of fact, I don't care for whisky, though I admit a fondness for light wines and beer. Seriously," and I abandoned my light manner, "I do want to make good here. I'll start at the bottom—day laborer, cleaning out the cages, anything you say. I'm on the level with you. I'm not good for much, but I can work and learn. And I'm no shirker."

Kephard's shrewd, hard eyes bored into me, and he chewed at his cheroot. I glanced around the office, noted the animal heads here and there, the native weapons that adorned the walls, the huge map of Siam behind the desk. Then, outside the windows, there burst forth a tremendous din—voices, gongs, whistles. I saw a native procession going by.

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"What is it?" I asked. "A wedding?"

"No," and Kephard exploded in a roar. "No! It's the funeral of a man killed by a tiger, not ten yards from his own door, on the city outskirts! Look here, I have no place for a man like you. I want no bums or relatives eating on me. I don't want you. I didn't ask for you."

"Granted," I said, fighting down the anger that rose in me. I met his gaze, gave him look for look, and kept my voice calm. "From your manner, you certainly waken no particular enthusiasm in me; but I'm not asking for charity. Will you, or will you not, give me a chance?"

"Hm!" he grunted. "What do you know about Siam?"

"Nothing, except that white elephants come from here."

This, for some reason, drew a grim laugh to his lips. He had strong, even white teeth that flashed through his beard when he laughed.

"Right!" he exclaimed. "Very well, Adams; I'll just take you up. Here in Bangkok there are twenty-one white elephants. Here's a hundred dollars—get it changed for tical notes at the hotel. From seven to ten o'clock tonight, I shall be working here. Before ten tonight, you show up here—"

A hasty knock. One of the native clerks looked in and spoke in English.

"Pardon, sir! It is Commissioner Struthers—he says it is important."

"Send him in," and my uncle leaned back in his chair. I pocketed the money he had handed me, and settled down to wait, wondering what sort of a job he was setting me. That it was some sort of a test, I could well understand, and I welcomed it.

Into the room strode a bronzed, uniformed Englishman, who gave me a glance and greeted my uncle with a familiar nod.

"MORNING, Kephard. News for you. Remember that escaped convict, Dubois? He and two other chaps dropped in on your jungle station at Prangkat yesterday; they raided it, cleaned it out of everything from ammunition to grub, and skipped. We just had a wire at headquarters about it. They went north into the Monghor district. Do you want to authorize any pursuit?"

My uncle shrugged. "No! Run your inefficient police system your own way, Struthers. I'll put in a claim against the government and that's all. These chaps will never be caught in that jungle; an expedition would be senseless."

The commissioner nodded. "I rather think you're right about it. A bad business, of course, but they'll probably work out along the Indo-Chinese border. Then the French will grab them. Well, that's all! See you at the club."

He departed. Kephard swung around, looked at me for a moment, then jerked his head.

"Oh, yes! Adams, bring me a white elephant here, at my door, before ten tonight. That's the chance you asked for. Make good, and we'll get on. Do you accept?"

I rose, with a glad nod of assent.

"Yes—and thanks! I'll show up before ten tonight. So long."

And donning my new pith helmet, I walked out, extremely satisfied with the way my luck had broken.

On my way back to the Astor House I recalled that the hotel placed its doorman at the disposal of its guests for any services they might desire; undoubtedly he could assist me in my

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present job. So I abandoned myself to the strange sights and sounds as my rickshaw rolled along back. Taxicabs and elephants mingled in the scenery; against a bank wall sat a snake charmer with his pets. Modern business blocks were backed by gorgeous temple enclosures—the whole city, on a vast scale, revealed this fascinating combination of ancient and new, Oriental splendor and Occidental civilization. Even airplanes droned overhead.

Regaining the hotel, I accosted the doorman, a stalwart, amiable native in uniform. He not only spoke English, but had been in America at the Chicago World's Fair during the past summer. He assured me that he was at my service for whatever I might require in Bangkok. So I asked him about getting a white elephant. He looked astonished, as well he might.

"I'm serious about it," I went on. "I want to get hold of one before ten o'clock this evening, delivered to Colonel Kephard—you know of him? No restrictions on size or sex. I've got a hundred dollars to spend on the getting. Now, can you manage it or not?"

"Sure!" he exclaimed. "You give me ten dollars in advance, and I'll take care of it."

So I complied, and the job was off my mind. He promised to get in touch with me about six o'clock, or seven at the latest.

For the rest of the day, I just drank in Bangkok. The city, the people fascinated me. Here were all sorts of Orientals, and all sorts of white people as well; it was a mélange of all races and nations. I even ran into a crowd of American lumbermen from the teak mills upriver.

By sheer good luck, as it turned out, I dressed for dinner and sat down to an early meal, a bit after six. When I had finished, I went to find the doorman, since he had not shown up. Another man was on duty, and I hunted up the hotel manager, asking where I could find the other chap.

"Sorry, Mr. Adams, but we discharged him today for irregularity," was the reply. "I hope you hadn't entrusted any commissions to him."

"Yes," I said. "He was going to get hold of a white elephant for me this evening. I want to get one—in fact, I must get one. My uncle, Colonel Kephard, told me to get him one tonight sure. Perhaps you can help me out?"

The manager stared at me, then I felt something was wrong when I saw him repress a smile.

"A white elephant? I'm afraid Colonel Kephard was having a bit of a joke with you," he said, and my heart went down with every word. "You see, Mr. Adams, white elephants are sacred beasts here—they are the private property of the king. Any interference with them, any attempt to buy them, would be a very serious matter indeed."

WELL, that was that. After a time I woke up to find myself walking down the street, so eaten up with anger and bitter resentment that I was ripe for anything.

I saw the whole thing now, of course. Kephard had taken advantage of my greenness, had set me an utterly impossible task, an unfair task. He meant to be rid of me, that was all. It was a dirty deal—but was I to go around and tell him so with a whine?

"New York Bar"—the electric sign flashed ahead of me. I shoved inside, and found myself in the middle of a wild party. Two or three of my fellow passengers on the Hokko Maru were there, and seized on me.

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"Here, Adams!" cried one. "Meet the Flying Cohen—Bangkok's first and only aërial taxi driver!"

I found myself shaking hands with a small, brown, laughing man. He had sharply waxed mustaches, alert features, and his gleaming, merry eyes held a frankness and a capability that I liked. We had a drink, then another.

After the third drink I blurted out my troubles, and was there a laugh. Even the bartender joined in, and set up a drink on the house. One of the crowd, however, started in to razz me, and he was rather nasty about it; things went from bad to worse, and I lost my temper all of a sudden. I knocked him across a table, and he started for me—then Cohen dived in between us. His strength and agility were amazing. He literally tore us apart, the others joined in, and the clash was over.

Cohen took me to a table in a corner, ordered a drink, and eyed me.

"Give me the lowdown on the story, Adams," he said. "Looks like a damned dirty trick; I've heard of Kephard, and I didn't think he was that sort. What about it?"

I told him, and suddenly a dancing eagerness leaped into his eyes.

"Look here! Do you still want to get that white elephant?" he exclaimed.

"You bet I do! But it seems to be impossible."

"Never heard the word." Cohen thumbed his waxed mustache. "Pardner, I'm with you. I'll go the limit; you got a dirty deal, and I'm for you. Let's see—about seven thirty. Yes, we have time to pull it. Are you on?"

"Try me," I said delightedly. "You have a scheme?"

He grinned and bounced up. We left the place, hailed a taxicab, and he ordered the driver to the air field. Cohen was chortling to himself, but refused to impart his plan to me. When we got to the hangars, we left the taxicab and he let me into his own hangar. There he had a four passenger Bird—three seats and a jump-seat—and a sweet little ship she was. The safest ship going, according to Cohen, and could land on a dollar bill anywhere. He pointed to buckets and huge sponges in the corner, then opened up a locker.

"I've got the very stuff here," he said. "Grab two of those sponges."

I did so. Pocketing a large packet from the locker, he led me out again. He conferred with the taxi driver, and we piled in. Then Cohen unbosomed himself.

"Pardner, I know this town, see? All about it. I got passes everywhere, palaces and temples and so forth. I put on a stunt for the king last week, and he gave me a pass that would knock a tourist's eye out! And I was driving an elephant only yesterday. Ask me no questions, and if we don't land in the hoosegow, we'll pull the trick."

We left the taxi for good, near an imposing gateway—an entrance to one of the big temples, whose grounds covered acres. We were, in fact, in an enclosure behind the temple itself. Straight ahead of us were elephant stalls, and at one side the animals were having their nightly wash, one by one. Some yellow-robed priests were around, but they merely gave us a courteous salute and asked no questions.

COHEN drew me into the shadows. Close to us, two men were at work washing the sacred beasts. One would fetch over an elephant, hooking his ankh or goad into the trunk and leading the beast, then they

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both would fall to work. The elephants were a dirty gray, and I knew they were the alleged white animals. When they finished scrubbing, the elephant would blow water over himself and they would get another. A number of such groups were at work.

Presently Cohen slipped off, after demanding money from me. I saw him talking with the two men near by, who seemed to know him. One of them slipped off and came back leading a small elephant. Cohen came hurriedly to me.

"Come along, it's all fixed up!" he exclaimed. "Hump yourself, pardner, or we both land in jail!"

The two washers had departed. Cohen led me over to the small elephant, brought out two buckets, and dumped his mysterious package into the two. Then I got the idea. With the sponges, we set to work—luckily, the place was poorly lighted. I asked no questions—how the Flying Cohen had happened to have this black waterpaint on hand did not interest me at the moment. Later, I found it was a polish he used for his plane, which was entirely black.

We daubed that black stuff over the little elephant, who did not like it by half, but offered no objections. We made a mess of him, and of ourselves as well. By the time we got through, my white evening clothes and Cohen's white flannels were a sight. At length, Cohen threw away his sponge and caught up the hooked ankh, which had been left for his use.

"Come on, pardner!" He hooked the little elephant's trunk. "We'll have to hoof it out to Kephard's place and there's no time to waste, either. The coast's clear. On your way!"

By this time we were both cold sober, and mighty nervous. But we put the deal through. No one came near us as we led the little elephant across the enclosure and out the gate. It was getting on toward ten o'clock by this time, and we pushed the pace as we went down the street. Luckily, Cohen knew the way.

It was five minutes to ten when I walked into the office where my unesteemed uncle was at work over his books. He lifted his head and stared at me.

"Great Scott! Have you been taking a mud bath?"

"No," I said. "Will you come outside and take delivery of your white elephant?"

His eyes widened. "Are you drunk, Adams?"

"I hope not. Your white elephant's waiting, as I said before. He's small, but his tusks are all trimmed up with gold, so he must be a choice article—"

Kephard leaped to his feet and rushed me outside. I introduced him to the Flying Cohen, but he stood there as though paralyzed. We rubbed up enough of the elephant to show his true color—and then Kephard flew into a perfect frenzy.

"You fool!" he cried, shaking his fist at me. "This means prison, punishment, fines, perhaps rioting—"

"Well, you asked for it, didn't you?" broke in Cohen. "Take it on the chin, you stiff!"

"Get into the office," snapped Kephard, and called hastily. A number of natives came running out. He bustled us inside, gave them hasty directions about the elephant, and then followed us into the office. Sinking into a chair, he glared at me.

"There'll be hell to pay over this, Adams! It can't be hushed up. The police, perhaps the whole blasted government, will be on your trail—"

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"All right," I said composedly. "It's your funeral. You set me a job, and I did it. Now come across! I've made good on a joke proposition, so let's be serious."

"Aye," he growled. "Serious enough! You two chaps will have to clear out."

"To save your hide? Not much," I said.

HE glared at me for a moment, then the humor of it struck him, and his lips twitched.

"I see. You're right enough, too. A real job, eh? Then look at this." He rose, and pointed to the big map of Siam on the wall, indicating a space that was largely empty of names. "The Monghor district, chiefly jungle, and little explored. Now come with me and I'll show you something—both of you."

Kephard had suddenly become intent, grimly determined. He took an electric torch from his desk and jerked his head at us to follow him. The Monghor district, eh? The commissioner had spoken of it this morning. I remembered about the three ex-convict raiders. What was my precious uncle about to do—demand that I run them down?

I might have known better. Nothing so simple as that. And by his manner, I knew that we were about to see something startling.

He strode ahead of us, out into the inner compound. The chattering of monkeys, the angry scream and growl of other caged animals, greeted the sweeping flash of the light. Across the compound showed the electric lights of a bungalow. Halfway to it, Kephard halted abruptly and swung upon us.

"Twenty years ago," he said jerkily, "Hugh Cabot was my best friend. He was kidnaped, with his young wife, and carried into the jungle by native bandits. Nothing was heard of him again—until two years ago. Then he was found, in slavery among a hill tribe, by some of my hunters. I want you to see him, listen to him; I'm keeping him here. His mind is feeble, for he's been through hell, but I'm slowly getting him back to his own old self. Look at him, and see what the jungle can do to the finest man who ever stepped!"

He strode on again, threw open the door of the bungalow, and led us in.

Sitting at a table, dazedly trying to read a magazine, was a ghastly caricature of a man. A creature so deformed by scars, by suffering, that to look into his frightful face was to feel a sharp contraction of the heart. Kephard greeted him warmly.

"Hello, Cabot! Look here, tell these chaps about it, will you? About what happened."

The unfortunate man flinched, blinked at us, put a shaking hand to his mouth.

"I don't know," he mumbled. "I haven't remembered any more—"

"Never mind! About the tower, I mean," said Kephard.

"Oh, the tower! That was after my wife died," Cabot muttered in a dead, dull voice. "I buried her, you know. That was after we got away and were in the jungle together. The baby was born and my wife died. Then there was a tower."

He paused. "A tower—I can't remember. A tower with human faces, huge faces! Savi was with me and the baby—the native woman, the nurse. Good woman, that Savi! The baby grew into a fine child—everything gets so dim, Kephard! I can't remem-

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ber at all. There was a fight with natives; I can recall something of the sort. Then whips, torture, hard work—long centuries of it. Years of it. Where's my baby girl, Kephard? You'll get hold of her?"

"Yes," said my uncle gravely. "I'm doing my best, old chap. You're improving fast, too. That's more than you've talked for a long time. All right, you chaps."

He motioned us out, and presently came after us, overtook us, and led us back in silence to his private office. There he went straight to the map, put his finger on the Monghor district, and turned to us.

"See that? He thinks that baby girl of his is still there—alive. After all these years. Ah—left my pipe at the bungalow! Wait. I'll be back in a minute."

KEPHARD departed, with a growl. I glanced at Cohen and grimaced.

"Queer business, all this! Suppose my uncle really believes the girl is alive?"

To my astonishment, he nodded, eagerness flashing in his eyes.

"Sure. That yarn's been all over town; I've heard a lot about it, Adams. Investigation was made, but they found nothing. There are wild stories, too, about a white girl among the natives out that way."

"What did that poor devil mean," I asked, "by a tower with faces? Was that a pipe dream? Sounds like a fairy tale—"

The Flying Cohen started, came to his feet, paced up and down the office.

"No, no," he said, under the spell of some emotion I could not fathom. "Adams, it's the most fantastic sounding things which are usually real. All this has given me a jolt, a bad one. About the tower, especially. You know, I told you I put on a stunt for the king last week—here, wait a minute—"

He swung around to the map, produced pencil and paper, and began measuring distances. Then he turned, a blaze in his eyes.

"By golly, it might be! About that stunt—I took some natives out, dropped 'em in the jungle, and came back the same day. They're not back yet; the king is figuring things out when they come, time and distance and so on, looking to buy some planes. Well, I must have hit just about the edge of this Monghor district. Anyhow, when I was looking for a landing place, flying low over the jungle, I did see a tower with faces! One face to a side, monstrous things. Some of these buried cities have them—the old Khmer cities that were wiped out hundreds of years ago, swallowed up by the jungle."

"How can you land in the jungle?" I demanded. He shrugged.

"Easily. Plenty of wide open spaces, even hills. It's not all trees, you know. And, Adams, I bet I could find that tower again! I remember the landmarks perfectly—"

Just then my uncle came stamping back into the office, filling his pipe. Cohen shut up. Holding a match to his pipe, Kephard bent his shaggy brows on me.

"Well! You heard what Cabot said about his baby, eh?" he said. "That's the job waiting for you, if you want it. Go and find that baby! You get nine hundred dollars expense money, to make an even thousand I'm wasting on you. Also, you can call on any of my men for help, at my various jungle stations. Now, then, do you want the job or not?"

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"It's a bargain," I said. "You're on."

"Better let me in on it," said the Flying Cohen. Kephard gave him a grim look.

"I think so myself; you fools! By tomorrow morning they'll be combing the city for you, after the sacrilege you committed tonight! But wait, Frank; don't jump at the thing. You saw what the jungle did to Cabot. You don't know what it's like! Snakes! Cobras, green vipers! Leeches. Leeches everywhere that suck your blood, penetrate through any clothing."

"Never mind all that," said Cohen abruptly. "Let's have the money. We'll take the job."

My uncle gave him a hard look. "Oh, you will! Cabot was lost twenty years before he was found. To reach the Monghor district will take weeks—"

"Tosh!" The Flying Cohen twirled his mustache and grinned amiably. "Kephard, for a couple of hundred years poor earnest devils tried to reach the North Pole afoot, some of them spending years in an attempt, slodging along in the ice and snow! Then a chap hopped into his airplane and did it in a couple of days. Suppose we bring back the bacon—that is to say, Cabot's girl—what do we get?"

Kephard surveyed us grimly.

"Twenty thousand dollars, each; just to be saying something," he growled. "Cabot has an estate that has grown into huge proportions. He's a rich man. He'll pay anything. If you are serious—"

"I am," I struck in. "Are you? Then let's see the nine hundred."

My uncle got a steel box out of his desk and produced the money.

"There you are," he said. "When are you leaving?"

"Now," said the Flying Cohen. "So long."

CHAPTER II.

INTO THE JUNGLE.

OUT in the street Cohen caught my arm.

"What about it, Adams? Was it a bluff or do we see it through?"

"I'm game if you are," I said. "Here's the nine hundred. I'll shoot it on you."

"Done!" he said, and gripped my hand. He had a good, hard grip, too. "Now listen. The old boy was right about one thing; there'll be hell to pay over this elephant business! You come along to my boarding house and get a raincoat to cover your stained clothes. Then go to the hotel—they'll store your luggage for you. Change your clothes, pack your stuff and leave it, and meet me in an hour at the air field. Say, twelve thirty."

"You going to start in the middle of the night?" I asked.

"You bet I am," he said earnestly. "I know these brown brothers, and they take their white elephants seriously! If it hadn't been for the drinks, I wouldn't have made such a fool of myself. I'll have an hour's work or more before we can leave, anyhow, and you can lend a hand with it. For that matter, we might snatch a couple hours' sleep in the hangar, and then get off before dawn. The main thing is to get out of sight and stay there. Suit you?"

"Agreed," I said promptly.

When I got back to the hotel, things were already stirring. My uncle, it seemed, had sent back the elephant with some yarn of the animal having been found in the street; which did not

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go down at all. Meantime, the elephant being missing, the two chaps bribed by the Flying Cohen had been laid by the heels and presumably forced to talk. Anyhow, they talked.

I got hold of a taxicab and started for the flying field. Luckily, I had the hotel fix up some food and bottled water. On the way, we passed squads of soldiers and police, and my taxi driver, who was a Frenchman, jabbered with them. Then he turned to me.

"They are going to the airdrome also, *monsieur,* to arrest some person there."

"Step on the gas," and I handed him a banknote. "Has the government any airplanes?"

"All kinds, *monsieur,*" he said cheerfully. "Sea planes, bombers, pursuit—"

"Then drive like hell!" I told him, and fortunately he did so.

When we bumped over the field to Cohen's hangar, he had the Bird outside and was warming her up. There were no field lights of any kind. He came up to the taxicab.

"You've got about two minutes to clear out," I told him. "Police and soldiers are on the way. I've got grub and water here—"

"Catch hold, then," he said, and grinned. "Grab a leather coat inside the hangar."

The Frenchman lent a hand. We got the stuff in the ship and Cohen bundled me into the front seat. Then the Frenchman beat it in a hurry. Cohen climbed in, opened up the motor, and the ship moved. Thirty seconds later we were lifting into the moonlight, and the earth dropped away.

Cohen passed me a telephone headset, and we settled down.

"I'm full up with gas and oil, and have an extra five gallons of gas," he said. "If my figures are right, we'll hit the Monghor district some time around noon, so make the best of it and get some sleep."

"Where'll we go to from there?" I inquired, and heard his gay laugh.

"Talk about that when the time comes. Don't forget, I've got a drag with the king!"

As he went on to explain, the Bird was no record breaker but was made for such work as this, being fast, able to land at a mere forty, and requiring little landing room. Night flying is not the most exciting thing in the world, however, especially when drifting at ten thousand feet above a perfectly dark country. So, after a time, I curled up and went to sleep.

DAYLIGHT wakened me. The sun came up to show an unbroken sea of mist below us, which cleared off to reveal unbroken green country. I opened up the water and food, and we had breakfast as we tore on.

Cohen had charts in plenty, but not where he could get at them right now. Besides, as he said, we needed none for the work in hand. He knew exactly how to retrace the course he had flown, since it was entirely compass work until he struck a certain river. We were depending on his head to find that tower with faces.

We droned on, the engine never once missing, the miles steadily flowing behind us, over mountain, jungle and river. And in the course of these hours we got pretty well acquainted. Perhaps from lack of sleep, Cohen had lost some of his gayety. He looked older, more capable and alert. He had been barnstorming around the Orient for a couple of years, I found.

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"Believe it or not, Adams, I told that uncle of yours the exact truth," he said. "Here we're covering a hundred miles an hour, and bored stiff doing it; whereas, if you went out with all the trappings of his animal expeditions, you'd be weeks covering the same ground. I'm going to try and make a dicker with him to fetch in small animals, reptiles and so on, by air—if we ever get back to Bangkok."

By the time noon came, he had worked out every detail of such a scheme, and it looked good.

It was just past noon when the silver thread of a river showed below us. Right after, Cohen came down to a thousand feet or so, and passed me the binoculars. We were close to where he thought he had seen the tower on his previous trip, and I scanned the country below.

Then, all of a sudden, it leaped at me. A huge, grotesque face at the edge of the jungle—so suddenly it came, that I was startled. I let out a yell, and Cohen circled—but the thing was lost again. We could not find it.

"There's a village, anyhow," he called. "Beyond those rice paddies. Suppose we land and start some inquiries. To tell the truth, I'm about done up."

I nodded, still searching the trees vainly for another glimpse of that grotesque, startling face — probably long miles away by this time. Below us appeared clear spaces, with stretches of old rice paddies, now dry, which after the rains would be small swamps. We could not pick up the village again either, but knew it could not be very far away. Near the paddies, at the edge of the trees, appeared some sort of a building.

We came down amid high elephant grass that grew everywhere, scooted across the paddies, and came to a rough but good enough landing, with a takeoff all ready before us. We climbed out, stiffly enough, landed the grub and a bottle of water, and looked around.

"We might see what that building is," suggested Cohen, and we walked toward it. Upon finding it to be apparently nothing but a shrine, we lost interest and went back to the ship. Cohen was dead for sleep, and after a hasty meal he got out a blanket and curled up. I promised to waken him in a couple of hours, if nothing happened.

So this was the jungle, unknown, unexplored! It looked anything but exciting to me. With the binoculars I surveyed the landscape, hoping to pick up some sign of that tower with faces, but in vain. As Cohen had said, there were plenty of clear spaces in the jungle itself, which consisted of trees enormously high, their tops knotted in a solid roof, and below them a sort of twilight through which the huge trunks ascended. There was no undergrowth, as a rule, except where bamboos and other cane varieties sprouted in impenetrable masses. So far as danger was concerned, the horizon was empty.

PRESENTLY I sauntered over toward the shrine once more and gave it a closer inspection. Under the thatched roof was set an image of Buddha, and about it were flowers and some rice in a bowl. Suddenly I started, catching sight of something in the thick grass below the image. Parting the grass, I saw an old weathered slab of wood set in the ground—and then realized that this was no shrine, but a grave!

What was more, an English inscription was carved in the wood—difficult

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to read, until I knelt. Then the words hit me like a blow:

AMY CABOT

Died in Childbirth

1914

Amy Cabot!

According to my uncle, Hugh Cabot had disappeared twenty years ago. Here, then, was where his wife had died. Here was corroboration of his fantastic story!

But what about the baby? He had left her in the tower with faces, he told us; left her there with the nurse —what was the woman's name? Savi. Yes, that was it; Savi. The tower was somewhere in this district, for I had certainly caught sight of one of the faces, but it might be long miles away from this point.

I turned, meaning to waken the Flying Cohen and tell him of this discovery, when I saw something move in the high grass. A face—a man's face —then the torso lifting into sight, staring at me, grinning! Another movement, another face—suddenly I saw them all around, in a great circle that contracted. Brown men, grinning, laughing, holding spears and bows, and a few of them with old-fashioned muskets.

With a burst of laughter they came leaping in, friendly enough and jabbering away. I walked toward the plane, and saw that Cohen had wakened. Other natives were around him, and now a tall, severe, yellow-robed priest, with shaven head, came stalking through the other men and greeted us.

"*Bon jour!* Hello!" he exclaimed, to my stupefaction. He actually had a few words of English, but he spoke very fair French, which both Cohen and I could savvy. The village, according to him, was a few miles away, and seeing us land, the natives had thronged forth to bid us welcome.

"They think you have come from heaven," said the priest, unsmiling. He had the air of thinking to himself that he knew better. Indeed, he seemed to join in the welcome with a grudging manner, as though forced to it. However, he proved decent enough.

Many of those natives, it turned out, had never seen a white man before, and the ship was just plain magic to them. In the middle of it all, an old woman showed up, forcing her way through the throng, shouting at the top of her voice and holding up something on a cord to me and Cohen. The priest strode up to her and sternly sent her packing, then turned to us.

"She wanted you to take that amulet to her daughter in heaven," he said, rather scornfully. "She is not in her right mind."

I thought no more of the incident, for now both Cohen and I quite literally had our hands full.

The whole population of that village, which must have been a huge one, had turned out to greet us and brought along all the essentials of a feast. The priest disappeared, as though not approving of the matter, but nobody cared. The men, fine, stalwart fellows, their women and girls, and even the kiddies, flocked around us and a great time was had by all. Every one was in a high good humor, and the less we understood what one another said, the more fun everyone had. There was palm wine galore.

THEN we heard the word "Tevadas!" repeated, and Cohen said it meant dancing girls. He was right. The crowd opened up and

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arrayed itself in a semicircle, and into view came a troupe of Siamese dancing girls. They were in full costume, too —copies of the old Siamese costumes, with high conical hats, all gold and silver.

"They live all over the country," Cohen said to me, "in sort of schools, and their chief joy in life is to perform—just like goldfish. Now we've got to suffer, darn it!"

We sat there, too, for the rest of the afternoon, while those dancers postured, and music of flutes and drums tootled off the hours. I told Cohen about the grave, but we could not get away to look at it, for this celebration was so evidently being held in our honor that we had to stick around.

Toward sunset, however, the dancers wound up and quit, much to our relief. Hunters came in with fowl and small game, fires were lighted, and several of the men who had fastened themselves on us kept amiably busy trying to talk with us. Before we knew it, darkness had come. We tried every possible way to inquire about Cabot's daughter, but as the priest did not reappear, failed to make ourselves understood.

That feast, I admit, kept us both occupied. We stuffed ourselves, and so did every one else; it was a grand celebration for all hands, and the Flying Cohen, with a bevy of laughing girls around him, kept everybody happy with his gay manner. It began to look like an all-night party, and as the full moon would soon be up, no one seemed to care a mite.

Then, during a lull in the proceedings, Cohen recollected the grave. He jumped up, and I joined him. With thirty or forty natives trailing around us, we headed for the shrine, each of us carrying brands from the fire. When we got there, the tall figure of the yellow-robed priest loomed up before us, stern and gloomy as ever.

He watched us like a hawk as I showed Cohen the grave marker, and I noticed that the crowd around had fallen silent. Then Cohen turned to the priest, and asked about the baby.

"The baby, you understand? The white girl. Where is she now? What became of her? This is her mother's grave, but where is she?"

I joined in the questions, but only for a moment. One look at the face of that priest froze me up. Somehow, somewhere, we had put our foot in it. The priest uttered a howl, then repeated it. Never from that day to this have I been able to understand what it all meant, unless, as Cohen thought, these natives somehow worshiped the white girl.

The natives around all repeated the priest's howl. He drew his yellow robe over his head, turned, and went rushing away. Then the natives drew back, and kept drawing back; they simply faded out of the scene and were gone, repeating that howl once more and then silently vanishing like ghosts. Not a single one of them remained in sight.

"*Ow ooglah!*" Cohen repeated the howl, as nearly as he could come to it, disgustedly. "What the hell, in other words. I never did like the looks of that yellow buzzard."

"And he didn't like ours," I said. "Well, what do you think of Cabot's yarn now?"

"We've proved it up—but that's not saying the girl exists. It just can't be. Got a cigarette to spare?"

I had, and flicked my lighter for him to boot. We returned thoughtfully to the scene of the feast, which was now absolutely deserted. The fires flick-

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ered low. Everything had been abandoned in a moment, it seemed. I picked up a bowl of palm wine and drained it.

"Hey! What's that?" exclaimed Cohen suddenly.

"The moon," I said. Through the trees was appearing a great golden-red disk.

"No, no! Listen! Don't you hear it?"

I obeyed. Then I did hear something; rather felt it, at first. The sound gradually became more audible, although very distant. A throbbing repetition of drum-beats.

"Say! You don't suppose there's any trouble?" said Cohen uneasily. "I've got a pistol hidden in the ship, if—hey, look there!"

INTO the firelight came a figure. It was that of the old woman, a veritable hag, who had wanted us to take her amulet to her daughter in heaven. She held up the thing and waved it at us as she came forward, babbling something.

"It'll make her feel good anyhow," I said, and held out my hand for the amulet. She gave it to me. Then she jabbered away, pointing. The drums were gradually getting louder, and the beat quickened a little.

"*Ow ooglah?*" asked Cohen. With a howl of terror, the poor old creature dropped down at our feet and covered her head. Evidently, those words meant something big to her. Then she came erect, whipped out a knife, and began some kind of pantomime. Cohen finally got it.

"She's warning us to get away, Adams!" he broke out. "See there—pointing to the ship and the sky, then to the drums—say, do you suppose that yellow devil has turned the crowd against us?"

"Something has. Probably our questions," I said. The old woman drew back, then turned and was gone in the darkness. "And those drums are getting louder and faster, Cohen! Looks to me like we've outstayed our welcome. Come to think of it, she was pointing to the moon all the time, wasn't she? And we figured that the tower lay somewhere east of here, after we lost sight of it. Could we leave here in a hurry?"

"Sure. Got to warm up the engine," said Cohen uneasily. "Darn it, I don't like these drums! Yes, with this moon we'd have no great trouble finding another landing place—got to take chances, of course, but this jungle flying isn't as bad as people think. Grass and open spaces mean flat ground."

"Well," I put in, "my suggestion is that we get the engine warmed up—"

Just then came a whiz and a spat. Straight down from the sky came an arrow, smashed into the ground between us, and splintered. Cohen jumped a foot.

"Pardner, you said something!" he exclaimed. "Let's go."

He made a break for the plane. I followed in more leisurely fashion, worried now by the drum-beats. They had grown loud and much quicker, the gradual crescendo of sound seeming to fill the whole jungle. The moon was up, flooding everything with light.

Then I caught a wild, frantic yell from Cohen, and saw him tumbling back out of the cockpit. I stared up at it, aghast. From the rear seat uncoiled a huge python, its head towering up above us. Then it slid away from the ship and was gone, no doubt as frightened as we were.

Cohen climbed up gingerly, settled into his seat, and started the motor.

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She caught at once. I started up. As I swung over into the front seat, *spat!* An arrow slapped into the fuselage six inches from me. Next instant I was in the cockpit and glad of it. The engine roared and roared. A moment later something whistled overhead, as a musket banged out in the grass and sent a load of slugs tearing above us.

"Good-by!" yelled Cohen, and we bumped away.

Another musket banged, and another, but quite harmlessly. We lifted, swooped, and then zoomed upward, soaring into the moonlight. Cohen threw me the telephone headpiece.

"Hey, pardner!" he said. "I'm going to cut down as close to the trees as I dare. You tend to watching for that tower, or any other good open space where we can land. A few minutes of flying will leave those rascals miles away and we'll be safe."

I assented. The moonlight was clear and full, and after we had been up five minutes he began to skim the treetops, heading eastward. He had no great hope of locating the tower, and neither had I. What he most wanted was to find a likely landing spot.

Suddenly I saw it. A fine, wide open space that suddenly appeared dead ahead. I pointed, and Cohen located it. He zoomed a little, circled around, and got his bearings on it. As there was not a breath of wind, the direction of our landing mattered little.

We went rushing down at the trees. Cohen opened her up, then we swooped into the clear space. Off to our right towered up the jungle, and to our left. We hit the ground, jolted, then came to a halt.

I sat there absolutely petrified. From Cohen came an incredulous gasp.

"Pardner, do you see it?" he broke out.

"Sure do," I returned.

There at the edge of the trees, far up, clear-cut and distinct in the moonlight, looked out a contorted grotesque face—an enormous face, like something seen in an evil dream.

CHAPTER III.

GOLD AND DEATH ARE BROTHERS.

"WELL, by golly! We've found it!" exclaimed Cohen, and drew a deep breath. "Found it when we weren't looking for it."

"It's the same tower you saw before?"

"I dunno, and don't care. Anyhow, it's a tower with faces—usually there's a face on each side, I believe. Wouldn't be many such towers lying around loose in this district. Go ahead and take a look. I'll be along after I get the engine covered and made shipshape."

I climbed out. Already we had forgotten our recent close call. The sight of this huge, ghastly stone face had crowded out all the past with its promise of the immediate future. We were getting somewhere, whether or not Cabot's daughter was still alive. We had proved up Cabot's story, and this was more than any one else had done hitherto.

As I came closer to this gigantic, leering face that showed among the trees, details became more clear. From above, the moonlight infiltrated down through the trees. The structure separated itself from the cloaking trees and stood out before me only half masked. It showed now as an enormous four-square archway rearing up for a hundred feet. Above each arch was one of these faces—only that toward me showed with any clarity.

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The face itself must have been close to fifty feet high, not carved in the stone but actually built up. Nearer view disclosed that the whole tower was ruinous, small trees and brush growing from it, fallen masonry around its foot; yet the moonlight veiled all this and touched the caricature of a face with soft fingers as the branches of trees around enfolded it gently. It was a thing to behold with awe and wonder.

Suddenly, as I looked, something moved high up—something white and glistening that transfixed me with astonishment. The branches were parted. Out into the full moonlight emerged the head and bust of a girl, her arms outstretched to hold back the foliage. For perhaps a full moment I saw her there, looking down at the plane and at me—etched sharply in the light, a gloriously beautiful vision.

Then the branches waved and she was gone, silent as a ghost.

Presently Cohen came along. I told him of my vision, and he scoffed at me as he surveyed the huge tower.

"You're seeing things, Adams. White girl, eh? Yeah, I could imagine it myself—see where those patches of stone show white under the moon? Come on back and get some sleep."

"Why not sleep in the tower?"

"With snakes all around? Not to mention tigers? Not me, pardner! I'm climbing up into the cockpit and staying there."

Which struck me as good sense, so I subscribed to it.

We did not spend the night in the ship, however. Cohen changed his mind when I showed him a fine inviting glade under the trees, some little distance off. We lugged over a tarpaulin and blankets, and dropped off to sleep in ten minutes. Folly? Of course it was; any tiger would have found us easy prey. However, we were undisturbed. There is a whole lot in being afraid of things—it makes them happen.

And had we known it, there were animals in the vicinity a thousand times worse than any tiger alive.

SUNRISE found us up and around. We went over to the tower, first off, and had a look around, but could locate no sign of any girl, and the Flying Cohen razzed me anew about my dream. We did find something else, though.

The tower, solid up above, made a cross-shaped double archway at the bottom—a mammoth archway, too. Standing in this arch, which was fairly clear of rubble and brush, we could see that four stone roads or causeways had once centered here. Only fragments remained. That going off to the south was completely lost to sight. Those to the west and north likewise showed only vestiges and were swallowed up by the jungle. The eastward road, however, while overgrown and ruined, still showed for what it had once been.

"I believe we can follow it, if you want to try," said Cohen. "Either by air, in which case we could make it out, or afoot. It must go somewhere—holy smoke! Come over here!"

I followed him. By the base of the wall he stooped and picked up something. It was a gold coin, which had lain in some brush—a broad gold coin, fresh and glittering like new, but unlike any coin I had ever seen. And on the stones near by was a blackened pool of dried blood.

"Looks like the gold mohurs they've got in the museum at Bangkok," said Cohen. "Say, where did it come from? And this blood—"

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"Ask me something easy," I replied. "Maybe the girl dropped the coin."

"And cut her finger looking for it," Cohen added sarcastically. "Let's go get some breakfast and then figure things out."

We returned to the ship. I got there first, and halted abruptly. Cohen joined me and I pointed. There beside the step, where the wheels had churned up the dust, was a tiny footprint. And on the wing, beside the step, was a more distinct impression—a small, perfect print.

"Now who's looney?" I demanded. "She was here last night. Put your big hoof beside that print and see the difference! Everything was wet with dew, and her foot left the mark here on the wing."

"You win," said Cohen. "Let's see what she swiped."

Nothing was gone; her visit had been one of curiosity alone, obviously. We broke out our food and water and made a meal, eagerly enough. No question now of tracing that old road from the air. Obviously, we had found the lost white girl, Cabot's daughter—and it was equally clear that she must live somewhere near by, perhaps in other ruins such as this tower.

There remained the problem of the gold mohur and the pool of blood, unsolved. But the solution of this was on the way. Rather, a guess at the solution.

Breakfast over, we decided to get going, taking along what was left of our grub, and a bottle of water. On the theory that the girl must live somewhere close by, we figured that we could settle the whole business in a day or so. We had no weapons except Cohen's pistol, and as this was no good on a jungle hike, we left it where it was, and started out.

We were approaching the tower, when Cohen gave a sudden startled cry, and ducked. I saw something glint in the air—a number of things, whirling, falling. Then Cohen leaned over and picked up another gold piece. Several of them had landed all around us. I looked up quickly, saw the green branches around the tower wave, and guessed the secret.

"It's the girl, Cohen! She's up there, throwing gold at us—"

"You talk like a hophead," said Cohen, staring up. "A girl slinging down handfuls of gold—my eye! Hello! There is something up there—"

The branches parted. A voice reached us, a scolding, chattering voice. Out at us came more gold pieces—straight down at us, too. We dodged, laughing. Then the branches were shoved back, and out came the source of this unexpected wealth. One disgusted sniff from Cohen, then he was gathering up the gold mohurs.

I STARED up at the monkey. A monkey it was, perhaps four feet high—a big fellow, but none the less a monkey. He chattered angrily at us, and was gone.

"There's your girl!" exclaimed Cohen. "You saw that monk last night—"

"Shut up," I said. He gave me a look, whistled, then tossed me half the coins. They were new, fresh, ruddy gold. We knew how the coin had come at the base of the tower.

"But what about the blood?" queried Cohen. "Maybe some one happened along, got hit by a coin, and shot the monkey. Another monkey. Oh, botheration! Let's be moving."

We did so, and found we had elected ourselves a real job. Yet, as we struggled along that eastward road or cause-

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way, the problem of the monkey and the blood recurred often to me. Natives eat monkeys, true; perhaps some native hunter, then, was responsible. I was closer to the explanation than I realized.

To have pierced the jungle itself would have been a hundred times easier than traveling along this ancient road. There was little difficulty in negotiating the steamy, open ground under the twilight formed by those enormous trees. Following the causeway was a different matter, because it was largely overgrown with brush and smaller trees.

At times it became mere heaps of stone and rubble. At other times it vanished completely from sight. Finally, after a couple of hours of hard work, we found that we could get on better by taking a course parallel to the old road, through the jungle itself, merely keeping in touch with the causeway.

Neither of us now had the least idea of quitting. The sight of that glorious girl's face in full daylight, her silvery laugh, the touch of the gold mohurs, acted upon us like magic. The road pressed on and on, apparently never ending, getting nowhere. None the less, we kept doggedly at it, expecting something to turn up at every new clump of jungle, at each opening in the trees.

Noon found us pretty well exhausted, but in good spirits. We located a trickle of fresh water, which would save our precious bottle, and halted for a rest and a bite to eat. All this while we had seen not the least sign of danger—no animals, no snakes, nothing to cause us any worry. We might have been traveling through a California redwood grove so far as any such peril went.

I was just lighting a cigarette when I paused, in the act of flicking the lighter. A thin, shrill, distant voice came in English. I heard the words perfectly.

"Dubois! We've got it! Where are you, Dubois?"

The Flying Cohen, who was dozing, suddenly sat up.

"Darn it, Adams! Are you a ventriloquist, or was that palm wine last night too—"

The voice came again, cutting him short.

"Dubois! The hunters have got her trail! Can you hear me?"

A deeper voice made response, closer to us, but the words did not carry.

"Clear trail!" came the first voice again. "We'll run the damned girl down now. Hurry!"

Then silence. I stared at Cohen, and he at me. Then I gasped.

"Dubois—the ex-convicts! Listen here—" and swiftly I told him about the commissioner in my uncle's office. "And they're on the trail of this girl, Cohen, no doubt of it!"

"More likely," he said, thumbing his mustache, "on the trail of that gold. Monkeys evidently pelt any one who comes along with gold pieces. Regular monkey trick. We'll probably find that she's half monkey herself, like that kid in the Kipling story—"

"You mean, half wolf," I said. "But where the devil does the gold come from?"

"That's probably what Dubois wants to know," and he grinned. "See here, pardner, this doesn't look so hot. Dubois and his gang are somewhere around here. They're after that girl, sure. Well, we'd better go back to the ship, head for Bangkok, and bring help back here—"

"Nothing doing," I said promptly.

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"We can't take the chance, Cohen. They'd shoot her down in a minute—evidently she's got a lot of that gold somewhere, and they want it. We'd have a long, hard trail back to the ship. Before we could reach Bangkok and get back here with any sort of party, her goose would be cooked. I'm going to stay right here on the job."

"Oke. You and me both," and Cohen shrugged. Then he came to his feet. "Let's go."

WE could only follow the causeway, for we had not the least idea where Dubois and his outfit were, trusting to luck and keeping our eyes open. We could not have come more than six or seven miles from the airplane in a straight line, but it had been slow going. Now we went on, struggling along in a line with the ancient road.

Half an hour passed, and still we saw no sign of any ruined city or other end to the causeway. Ahead of us opened out a wide, open glade, similar to that in which we had landed, but with elephant grass growing waist-high. We started across it and were nearly at the other side when, off to our left, a figure rose up among the grasses. It was that of a native, gun in hand, a malignant grin on his unhandsome face.

Then, ahead of us, came a movement. Out from among the nearest trees stalked a group of men, three whites in the lead, a number of natives around them. We had walked into the hands of Dubois.

"We're it," said Cohen, then lifted his voice. "Hello, there! This is luck!"

"Maybe so, maybe not," said one of the three whites. "Who are you? Where from?"

"Airplane crashed with us, a ways back," said Cohen as we halted. "Any camp near?"

The three made no response. They were a hard looking lot. Dubois was a strapping big fellow, a trifle taller than I am, and widely built. A big black beard swept over his chest.

The others were lean, shifty-eyed rascals.

"No camp, I regret," said Dubois, rather mockingly. "We are a scientific expedition. We also are lost. I am M. Dubois. These are my associates, Fraser and Harris."

Dubois had a certain humor—which I did not like. Fraser, a red-haired fellow with a scar across his face, grinned to himself. Harris scowled at us; he was rather small, and his face was plain mean. The natives with them were an equally bad lot, and now moved forward as though to investigate us more closely.

"Aw, cut out the comedy," snapped Harris suddenly. He jerked up the gun he carried, and I saw that it was a sub-machine gun, of all things! "You two jacks clear out and stay out."

"Thanks. You're a sociable crowd," I returned. "It's a free country, isn't it?"

"Maybe not," said Dubois, eyeing us.

Just then one of the native hunters, who had closed in around us, made a snatch for the goggles slung around Cohen's neck. Cohen caught the fellow by the hair, grabbed the next man, and knocked their heads together. The red-haired fellow, Fraser, suddenly leaped in from one side and his fist took the Flying Cohen squarely under the ear, knocking him flat and laying him out cold.

Well, that ended all the talk. I got

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Fraser, waded into him and gave him the one-two over the belt that doubled him up. One of the natives was on top of me with a knife, and I got my boot into him. Dubois rushed me like a wild bull, roaring at the top of his voice, and I stopped him with a sweet one square in his shock-absorber beard.

If Cohen had not been out of it, we might have had a chance. As it was, Harris came up behind me and swung his gun. I tried to dodge, but the butt caught me on the side of the head and knocked me into the arms of Dubois. The big frog could not use his fists, but he could fight like a hellcat, and before I got my head cleared, all of them were on top of me.

Why they did not shoot, I never did figure out. To avoid hitting one another perhaps. They ganged me, and made a good job of it, the natives lending a hand. I lost track of what happened after another rifle-butt swung into me and I went down.

Fight? Yes; I went on fighting, like a fool. If I had played dead, I might have got off lightly, but I was out to fight to a finish. And the finish came, with a last crack over the head that made me see stars.

Then I went under.

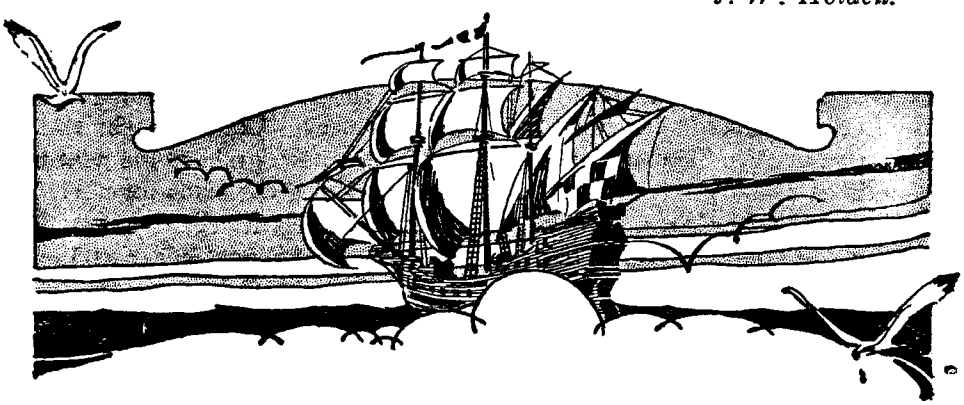
TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Alpine Heat

THE tremendous amount of heat stored even in the Alps was clearly demonstrated in the drilling of Switzerland's Simplon Tunnel, twelve miles long. When the third mile had been pushed through solid rock, the temperature was 95. At the fourth it had risen to 114. Thinking the heat to be merely local, the engineers pushed on with all speed, but at the end of five miles work had to be stopped. The temperature was 127. Powerful ventilators were installed, but no relief was felt until an icy mountain stream was diverted into the tunnel and sprayed on the walls.

Later they struck an underground river which gave both hot and cold water. In the heart of the Alps the grinding of the mountain mass was so violent that it crushed all but the toughest steel and concrete bracing.

J. W. Holden.



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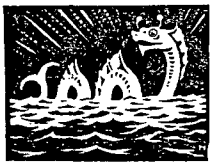
STRANGER *than* FICTION

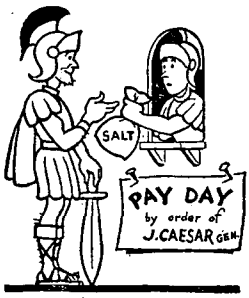


By JOHN S. STUART

A TON WITH ROD AND REEL

THE record for the largest denizen of the deep to be brought in with a rod and reel goes to W. W. Selkirk. In 1928 he caught in South African waters a Mako Shark weighing 2,176 pounds—over a ton.

WORTH HIS SALT



LONG ago, Roman soldiers received a daily portion of salt as part of their pay; and when, after a time, this was changed to money, the amount was termed *salarium,* or salt money. Hence arises our word "salary," so that "worth his salt" really means worth his salary or wages.

THE I-DON'T-KNOW

WHEN Captain Cook landed in Australia he saw some natives with the body of a strange animal they had just killed. Captain Cook inquired, "What is it?" The natives, not understanding English, answered in their language, "*Kan ga roo*" ("I don't know"). And so the Kan-ga-roo has been "I don't know" ever since!

WIVES GOT THE GATE

PRAJADHIPOK, the present King of Siam, is but one of his father's 370 children. The former king had forty wives, though the present king has only one, Rambai Barni, who accompanied him on his recent visit to the United States. Prajadhipok likes golf, squash, and speedboats.

INCREASE AND MULTIPLY!

ONE housefly living safely through the winter, can have six trillion descendants by the following September 1st. To say nothing of how many contagious and deadly diseases these offspring can carry!

FIREBUGS

A HOUSE in Michigan burned to the ground recently. This is how it happened: A mouse was chewing on some matches and set the box afire; a cat spied the mouse and chased him; a dog entered the race and began to chase the cat. During the commotion that resulted a can of kerosene was overturned, the whole house caught fire and all the animals burned along with it.

DIALS IN HIS EARS?

A CERTAIN man in Brazil doesn't need to buy a costly radio. The broadcast comes to him whether he wants to listen or not. In fact, he usually doesn't want to listen, for he finds it hard to get any sleep. His ears, radio-like, register broadcast sounds. The specialists he has consulted cannot help him.

ROBBER'S DAY BOOK

MOST crooks are careful to destroy every particle of evidence which may later betray them. But a robber in Rio de Janeiro once stole an album and started keeping in it souvenirs from each of his exploits. When the police got hold of the album it was thus possible for them to connect him with a number of unsolved robberies.

This feature appears in ARGOSY every week

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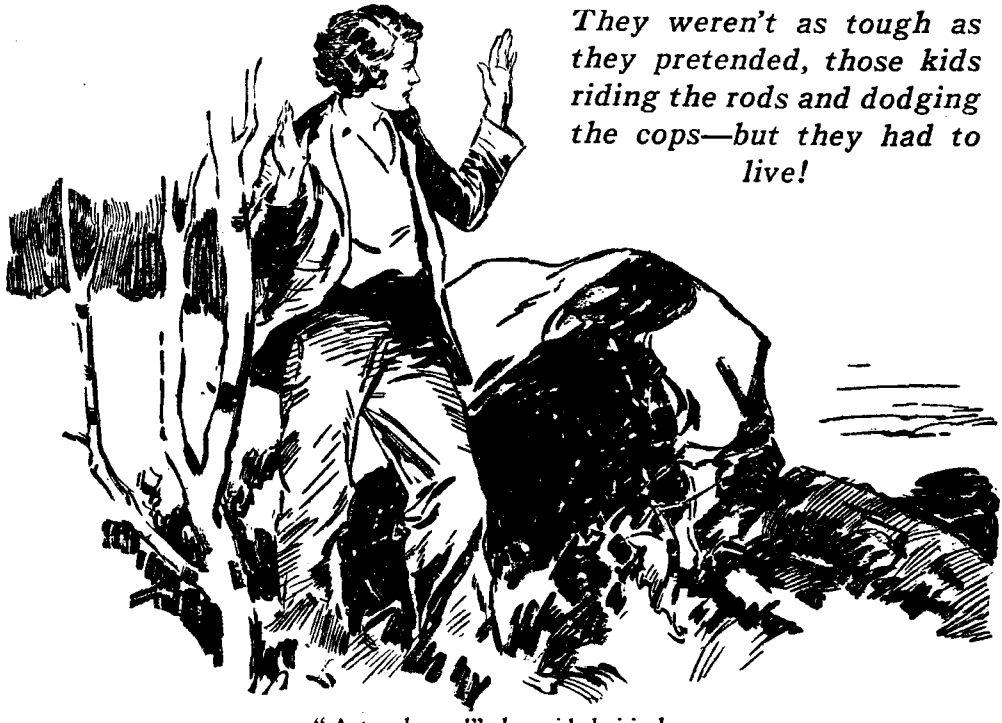

They weren't as tough as they pretended, those kids riding the rods and dodging the cops—but they had to live!

"A tough guy!" she said derisively

Roll and Go

By ROBERT CARSE

Author of "Loot," "Sons of the Prophet," etc.

CHAPTER I.

HUNGER.

DOWN below him, almost black in color, and sharp against the blue of the lake and the clear fall sunlight, the spruces and cedars grew in thick clumps. Behind him, and between him and the rise which ended with the railroad roadbed, three or four more of them grew, so that he was masked entirely from sight. He lay in an irregular triangle of sunlight. The breeze was off the lake, and it moved the heads of the cedars a little, bringing to him the strong and pungent odor of their resin. He smiled, his keen eyes upon the great, bright, flat expanse of the lake. The old corncob pipe which the farmer had given him grew cold in his hand.

A ship, a big ore carrier, was coming down the lake, bound for Whitefish Point. Her long, low hull was painted a deep red; her stack was silver, topped with black; her rounded, high wheelhouse gleamed white in the sun; her stack smoking a thin and smooth plume. Two weeks ago, he thought, still smiling, he had tried to get a job on one of those ships, down in Conneaut, on Lake Erie. He had got through the fence and down upon the ore dock, up the ladder and on

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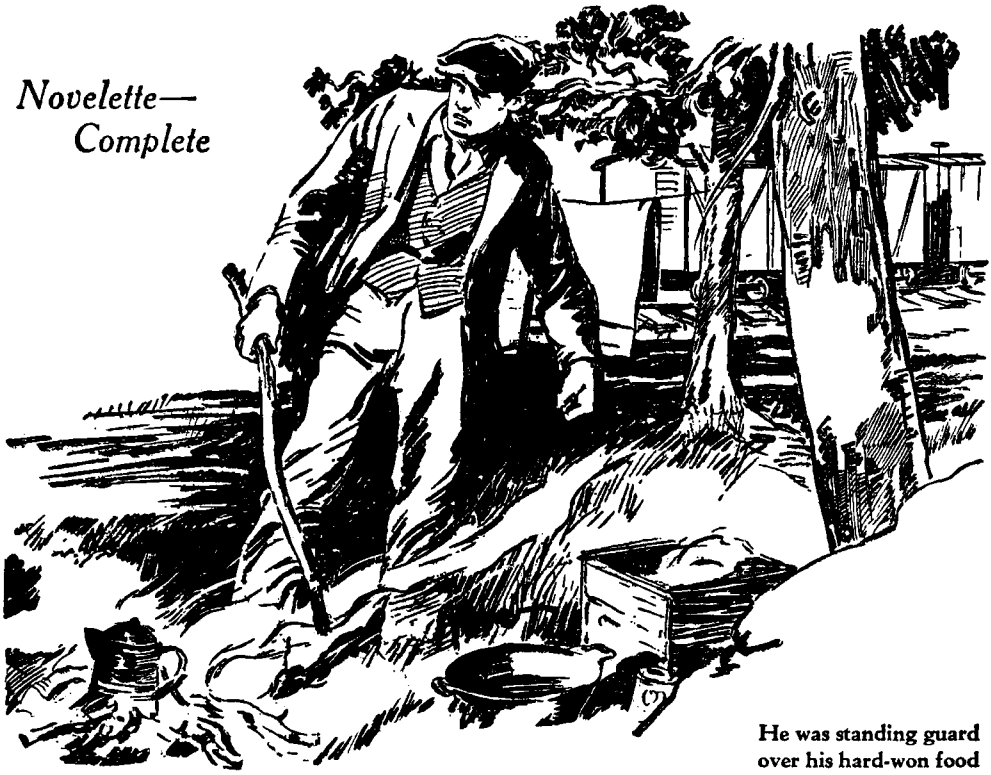
Novelette—
Complete



He was standing guard over his hard-won food

deck, to where a man with a felt hat, white cotton work gloves and a cigar had admitted to being the chief mate. The mate had not laughed at him or cursed at him, when he had asked for a job; he had just asked him to hold out his hands. Then he shook his head, rolling the cigar to the other side of his mouth, and said:

"You'll have to have a few more callouses on them hands, sonny, if you want to ship aboard these boats. Any of them bums hanging out around the Carriers' Hall, up there, will tell you that." Then, with a jerk of his head toward the rail and the ladder, the mate had turned away.

Gillis put the cold pipe down as he lay there in the sun. He held out his hands and looked at them. He cursed softly to himself, with pleasure; they were tough now, all right. Nine days with an ax and a double-header saw had done that. He lifted his right arm off the bed of needles he lay upon. The warm mid afternoon sun had taken some of the soreness out of it, but he could still feel the dull ache of those days of work. The first three days, even that squareheaded Dutch farmer's kids had laughed at him; but not after that.

No, nor the Dutchman, either. He had cut fourteen cords in nine days, had chopped down the trees — old, dead, tough apple trees—had sawed up the trunks and limbs, worked up the chunks into kindlings and stove lengths. No man—nobody—was going to laugh at you, when you did work like that. . . .

He raised his eyes and looked again for the ore ship. She was gone from sight; only the last thin gray trail of

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her smoke wavered along the glinting water. Slowly, his body stiff from that work and his all night's walk along the ties of the roadbed, he got up to his feet. He stood motionless, listening and staring. He could hear nothing and see nothing except a few circling, screaming gulls, down over the lake, and a few chipmunks under the bottom branches of the cedars. He turned, knelt down and took from its hiding place under the spruce needles his bundle, tied up tightly in his spare shirt.

HE opened the shirt and took out from it the food the Dutchman's wife had given him: smoked pork and some big, warty potatoes; half a loaf of bread which he had had left from the previous night; and the little can of coffee — his "Tommy can." The flat, fire-blackened, handleless frying pan was his only possession, aside from the clothes he had stood in when he had come up through the Dutchman's farm yard gate, ten days ago. The Dutchman had then told him he would not be able to pay him; but yesterday, when he had left, the Dutchman's wife had come out of the kitchen door and handed him this food. Then she had given him her hand and wished him luck.

He could smile as he thought of that. The Dutchy had been a good guy to work for, and it was good pork and potatoes that he had here now. The food in his hands, he swung around and stared again up at the bare, straight space where the roadbed lanced along north, through the scrub cedar and spruce. Then the tightened lines went away from around his mouth and eyes, and he set about making his fire, finding dry, small branches which would burn fast, and without much smoke. He had the potatoes buried to bake, and the Tommy can on for the pork; and he was starting down to the lake for water for his coffee when he became aware that some one stood behind him.

Without sound, and yet without haste, he went back to his fire and put the coffee can down. He kicked the fire out with his foot, taking care that he did not burn his thin, cracked shoes. Then he raised his head, and spoke in a clear and slow voice:

"Come on out, will ya? I ain't got any gun!"

There was no movement, no sound; even the chipmunks had stopped, hearing his voice. Suddenly, remembering all he had so bitterly learned, he reached down and grasped the biggest and the strongest of the branches.

"Come on out, you!" he said again. "I'll give you what you ain't looking for, bum!"

The girl laughed at him before he could see her clearly.

"A tough guy!" she said derisively, standing forth into the sunlight, both hands up where he could see them, and see that they were empty. He did not answer her; did not look at her again. He reached for his coffee, chunk of meat, and his Tommy can, swept out the potatoes, then picked up his pipe and his spare shirt. The shirt he threw loosely over his shoulder, then he started up the slope, carrying the food in his hands. He did not move rapidly, and he could hear what she said:

"All right, Jack. Go on. I wasn't bumming your chuck."

AT the top of the rise, where the cinders and gravel of the railroad grade stretched down into the thick, bright spread of the spruce

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and cedar, he stopped. She had kicked his fire together again, down there, and started it up; he could smell and see the smoke. He stood still, for how long he was not sure. She had eggs down there, and she was frying them. He could tell by the smell.

He laughed aloud, remembering that her hands had been empty, but that she had been wearing a man's suit of dungarees, a loose jacket and bagging trousers. Probably she had had the eggs and her Tommy can hidden in under that big jacket somewhere. He looked up and down the flat narrowness of the grade, straight as a gunbarrel here. There was no one with her, he knew; she was stringing alone, just as he was.

"Well, let her," he said silently. "I string with no kids—and no guys."

H put his food down upon the spare shirt, and was beginning to make it into a bundle when he found that he had left his bread down there below. He cursed as he fiercely knotted the corners of the shirt. He'd figured on that bread lasting him until he got the late freight out of here to-night.

"You ain't got any brains," he said out loud. "You let some bum of a kid swipe your fire and your bread—"

He rolled the bundle out of sight, against the trunk of a spruce; and then, noisily, and still very angry with himself, he ran down the slope toward the fire. It was deserted, and almost burned out. Near it, placed on a green tuft of spruce, was his half-loaf of bread. Then he heard her; she was coming up from the lake. Water drops still glistened on her hands, and upon the blackened Tommy can she carried in them. She had washed her face and swept slickly back her short hair from her forehead. He saw that she was young; perhaps younger than he was.

She looked up at him, but she did not smile.

"You find your bread?" she asked.

"Yeah."

"You want it, huh?"

"Sure, I want it."

"There it is."

"Yeah." He looked at her, his eyes dark and suddenly dilated. "I see it—smart guy!"

"Okay."

She had sat down across the dead fire, her feet, in big men's shoes, lightly gathered under her.

She reached down into the side pocket of her dungaree jacket.

"You got tobacco? I got papers."

Slowly, still watching her, he took out of his hip pocket the heel of the package of tobacco which the Dutchman had given him the day before yesterday. Carefully, she opened the tin foil of the rumpled package, smoothed the cigarette paper between her fingers.

"You're spillin' it," he cautioned, and then he laughed at her. "Your old lady know you're out?" he asked.

SHE put the tobacco and the little slip of paper down, coming to her feet abruptly.

"Pick up your tobacco, 'bo!" she ordered. "And your bread. And blow—before I have to get tough with you!"

She walked toward him as a man might have walked, her steps small and sure, her right hand down and easily clenched into a fist, her left bringing a short, thick club up from inside the waistband of her trousers.

"Beat it!" she said. "I took this stick off the last smart guy!"

He stood still, absolutely still, waiting until she would strike. And when she did, he stood aside, his loosely out-

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stretched hand catching the whistling end of the club, and wrenching it violently out of her grip.

"I don't want to hurt ya," he told her. "I don't fight, and don't string along with none o' you wild kids. . . ."

She kicked at him then, with her heavily shod feet, and struck sharp blows at his head and body. He was forced to trip her and send her reeling and tumbling back away from him. She hit solidly upon one side and shoulder, rolled over two or three times, tried to get to her feet, and then dragged herself up along the branches of a spruce. She stood there and tried to talk to him, but she could only weep. He waited until she had become silent, then he tossed the club over.

"Here," he said. "I don't want to hurt you, kid. An' I didn't. Them shoes is so big, you fell, yourself."

"Yeah?" Her voice was clear again now. "You ain't so big—or so old or tough yourself! You think—"

He waved one hand at her in a short gesture; he had been hungry too many times—and too lately—to fail to see the signs now. "Shut up, kid.—An' stay here. Yuh hear me?"

"Yes." Her eyes were wide and dark, in her pale, lined face. "Sure, I hear ya."

"All right; set down. I'm goin' up and get my stuff. . . ."

CHAPTER II.

STRINGING ALONE.

WHEN he came back, she sat just where he had left her, but she had been trying to make a cigarette and had failed. He could see the scattered tobacco grains and the twisted paper end where she had tossed them under a spruce branch.

"How was them eggs?" he asked her gravely. "Any good?"

She stared at him. "Listen," she began. "Since when you become my governess?"

"I ain't." He shook his head at her. "And I'm through bein' funny, kid. But you ain't ate in so long that you're about to fall apart. I c'n see that."

"And you're going to feed me, huh?"

"I'm goin' to feed you. Yeah."

He looked up at her gravely, from where he had knelt down and begun to remake the fire.

"Chuck like I got here is better inside than out, with these grifting guys around working th' road," he added.

"I ain't trying to grift. I carry my own stuff. You ain't heard me asking for food, or have yuh?"

Slowly and calmly, he smiled at her.

"Kiddo, you're goin' to fall right outa them shoes, unless you eat some more—and quick. I got chow here, and I been eatin' regular—right up to now."

Her eyes turned, and he noted their expression had changed. They had been studying his hands. Then, as he gave her a swift glance, she smiled at him.

"You been workin'," she said. "I saw that before. That's what got me sore—you figurin' me for a panhandler and a grifter. I ain't one of those jungle rats.—Those eggs. You smelled 'em, an'—"

"—An' they was terrible!"

He had the fire going now; the resin snapped and spurted fat little blue flames under the Tommy can, and above the buried potatoes. He poked at the branches once or twice more, watching his pork cook, then he moved back slowly and sat down beside her.

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"How long was you carryin' them eggs around with you in your poke?"

She lifted her head, and her gray, long eyes steadied upon his eyes.

"Four days. Th' other side o' Dorcas, I come up to a place where there's a woman has a chicken farm. Her old man is paralyzed, and the kids is almost all too young. Her and me laid two new concrete chicken house floors, and fixed the wire on four runs. She fed me good, but she was sellin' all the chickens that she wasn't giving to her kids and th' hired man she had in once a week. She give me a dozen an' a half pullets' eggs, when we was done fixin' them fence runs."

The girl's voice, almost harsh and unhurried, halted. She raised one hand and ran it along the nape of her straight young neck.

"I'll be growin' feathers yet," she said. "Maybe I can crow now."

She looked away, toward the lake. It held lights of opal and turquoise far out; nearer, of smoked jade. Then she started up, for from a distance, a train had whistled; the sound thin, but long and stirring, in the soft air.

"How long you been on th' lam, Jack?" she asked, her head a little to one side.

HE moved one hand, took out and filled the old cob pipe. He did not speak until it was alight.

"I ain't on any lam," he said. "I ain't any grifter, or any bum. I don't string along with the bums in any o' them railroad jungles, and I ain't tailed along with any o' them wild kids in th' gangs."

She looked up at him as she said, "That woman with th' chickens had a radio. There's a tune they're playin' on it now—'Who's Afraid o' th' Big, Bad Wolf?'"

"You're kiddin' me."

She smiled again. "I'm tryin' hard, Jack," she admitted.

"That's the name," he said. "That—an' Gillis. That was bound to happen to yuh sometime, out on th' road. You'd be sure to meet a guy whose name rightly was Jack."

"Funny, ain't it?"

"You can laugh."

"No, I ain't." She was turning slowly toward him, so that she could look into his face and watch it constantly. "Joey," she said, "that's my moniker. Crain; that's the other part of it.—That Joey part is for Josephine."

He did not speak for a time, and then he said: "You ain't so hard."

"Hard enough, guy."

He smiled and looked at her. "Yeah.—But you ain't a bad kid."

Her hand went out in a flat and familiar gesture, one he had seen made hundreds of times in city streets and lodging houses and hobo jungles.

"Cut it out!" she said hoarsely. "I'm seventeen, and that's no lie, and you ain't any eighteen yourself."

For a second, he considered telling her he was twenty-one; then he recalled the Army recruiting sergeant on La Salle Street who had laughed at that.

But suddenly she seemed tired—tired, at least, of arguing with him, or of talking even. She shut her eyes. It seemed to him that she shut them for a long time. After which she said, in a faint whisper:

"You know where a fella can find work, Jack?"

HE moved to the fire before he answered, and brought back the food and coffee. They ate it all, in silence, swiftly, and then he spoke.

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"I been working for a Dutchy farmer down the pike. I worked up cord wood for him. He says up in Mounter there's work. Some guy has got a contract for hauling out timber, there. He's hiring guys, they say."

"That ain't a big town, Mounter."

"No. But this here job is up in back. In the timber."

"Yeah, but that'll bring dough into the town, some guy starting a big job like that. They ought to hire a couple o' waitresses, there in the eating joints in the town."

He spoke as if that did not interest him at all.

"Not if they got any town girls they can put in. You ain't even got a dress."

"Yeah, I got a dress. Underneath. And they'll hire yuh, if you speak smart an' look smart—an' if you'll work for less than them town girls for a while." She closed her eyes, wearily. "But I suppose you ain't going to highball into Mounter now? An' I suppose you don't know what time a rattler will be hauling through here to-night?"

He got up and walked alongside the smoldered ash of the fire for a while. Once or twice he looked directly at her.

"I string alone," he said. "I don't string with nobody."

"That goin' to keep me off that rattler to-night?"

He swore, but not at her, and not very profanely.

"If you want to roll, that rattler'll be through here, so's you roll with it—sure! But, I don't partner with no girls."

Her laughter had a mocking sound. She said:

"You're telling me? My old man left home when I was a kid, in sixth grade grammar school. He went out there to Russia. He was an electrician, and they were hiring a lotta guys like him for Russia. Anyhow, he ain't never come back since. My mother, she ain't dead; but she just as well might be. She's worried herself out of her head, these last years, wonderin' was he dead, or wasn't he. She's on th' town now in Megantic. That's down in Connecticut. Her and my kid brothers and sisters.

"I worked two years in a factory there, but some guys came along and said that was against the law, and tried to take me out of there and put me in one of these here girls' homes. They said I was too young to work, but I told those guys I was too old to go into any girls' home. They put me in anyhow, and I busted out. Eight months—and I ain't asked any man or any woman for anything, Jack."

HE grinned when he saw her grin. He said:

"I can see that. I ain't ever been on the panhandle myself. I don't take no grift. But, don't you ever get fed up—always on th' roll?"

"You're rollin' yourself, ain't you?"

"Sure. — This ain't any argument, kid. I don't like standin' in them bread lines. No, nor rollin' with those thievin' packs o' kids. Sure, I been in th' cooler once or twice. They got me once in Ashtabula, an' once in Muncie. Ridin' freights. But, I wasn't stealing nothing; and I hadn't ate, or they wouldn't 'a' caught me runnin'. They let me out of those coolers in the morning.—They kicked me out before they fed the real customers."

She was looking at him. "I figured you pretty much for a guy like that. Any guy who would up an' leave half a loaf o' good bread, an' make a cooking fire in broad daylight."

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He started to get up, pronouncing curses she could not hear; but she put her strong red hand against his shoulder and held him back in a seated position.

"Roll me a cigarette, will yuh, Jack? I got papers. Here—"

She watched him as he rolled them.

"Ain't that swell!" she said, approvingly. "But I always ruin them when I got to lick that fold there down, to finish it an' hold th' tobacco in.—Where you from, Jack? You got folks, too?"

He looked down at the lake, where night swirled over the water, black and ominous, then at her. A small, deep line, like that of anger, came between his eyes. He said, first:

"I ain't ever talked to any kid like this. Yeah. I got an aunt—in Pottsville. That's Pennsylvania. But, my old man and my mother're dead; I never seen them, that I can remember. My aunt's got her own kids. I rolled outa there, about two years, now. I ain't been back."

He pushed up from his forehead his cap, pocked with little brown cinder burns; shoved it back onto his thick, dark hair.

"Let's not talk about that," he said. "An' let's get up along now; look it over. The rattler hauls through here pretty soon."

CHAPTER III.

TOUGH GUY.

A MOON, the thick, soft, golden hunters' moon, lay upon the lake when they again looked down upon it from the top of the rise. A wind was in the cedars and the spruces, and a few geese, black and swift through the gold runnelling of the moonlight over the lake, swung along in flight to the south, like so many great arrows.

She shrugged a bit as she knelt beside him down in the cinders.

"It's a cold country," she whispered.

He nodded to her, his head already up and turned the other way, in the direction the train would haul from.

"Yeah," he agreed. "But most of the 'boes don't work this way, in th' winter, and so a guy has a chance. Down South, they hand you six a month, a year, for ridin' a rattler. And all them chain gangs ain't in th' movies, neither. Get yourself set now, kid."

"It comin'?"

He smiled, his head lifted to the sky. She had heard no sound, and she knew he had not; nor could she see or sense any vibration in the lean, dully shining lines of the rails. But then, almost flowerlike in shape against the pale sky, she could see the faint, quick clouding of sparks from an engine chimney, so far distant that it seemed to be no more than the size of a man's hand.

"Pullin' hard," she said.

"That's right," he said. "Keep that stick ya got handy. Some of the 'boes up in this country got a trick; they ride th' rods, with a plank. When they see a couple o' guys like us swing on, they come on up, after, an' knock ya on th' head and roll ya fer what ya got. Before th' railroad bulls or th' shacks can git a chance to."

"It ain't the first one I've grabbed," was all she said.

In the darkness, he studied her for a while, silently.

"Listen," he said then, just as they heard the first hoarse panting, the first dim rumbling of the freight. "You got any dough on you?"

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Her eyelids went down until her eyes were slitted gleams.

"They'll kill me before they take it offa me. Yeah, I got two bucks. An' that buys new shoes, in th' town where I get a job."

"Okay, babe." His voice was harsh. "I just wanted to know. Me, I ain't got a dime. I was plannin' to break into a freight, on a night like this, an' get out of th' cold. But with you with dough on you, we gotta grab a gondola, or a flat, so we can take it on th' lam, an' jump if they crack down on us."

"You're a good guy," she said.

HE did not answer that; he was watching the train. Its headlight flamed in the night, splitting back the sort yellow wash of the moon, widening along the trees, making the tracks gleam.

They lay flat and motionless, their heads down and their faces held in their crossed arms, their coat sleeves over their hands, so that no white or light part of their bodies or clothing would show. Past their hands, the tracks shook now. The tie-plates and spreaders made small whimpering sounds; and they heard, against the rough gasps of the engine, the thick hissing of the steam outlets, and the throbbing clash of the drivers.

Steam slid down and enveloped them, and they could sense and see in their memories the clean, bright clutch and release of the big steel shafts. They heard and smelled the dropped coals from the firebox.

When the engine and the tender had passed, they opened their eyes. It was a long train; perhaps fifty cars. Far down the grade, the tail light on the caboose was a fine red streak of light through the darkness. Against the sky and the cedars above, they could mark the irregular lines of the roofs of the cars. Following four sealed express cars, there were refrigerator cars; then a horse car, empty; two oil cars; a flat car carrying three tractors, hooded and clumsy in canvases; a string of freight cars, all closed and locked and sealed; then a line of gondolas; with more oil and freight cars in back.

He could see no lights and no figures, moving along the footwalks of the roofs; nor any in the open cars. He got up to his feet, his body bent down, his face turned against the cinders and the bitter smoke.

"Set?" he asked.

"Yeah."

He ran, with the train. He ran faster than the train, then he slowed, and waited for the end of a certain car; saw it coming toward him; and increased his stride, running more rapidly, knowing that she was right at his shoulder, her paces keeping time with his.

He swung; then he sprang, in a long motion, his hands catching the moist, cold steel of the hand ladder.

When he was at the top of the ladder, poised there with one leg over the side of the car, he looked down.

She called to him, "Get in, guy!" and he could not help laughing silently at her as he slid down inside.

The car had lately carried soft coal; but it was empty now, and the wind came down inside, muttering, lifting up and flinging up the black dust in a stinging, sharp sheet. Immediately, he bent down and ran to the front end of the car, hunching up on his elbows so that he could look ahead or back, at the rest of the train. She was down in the car now. Through the lifting swirl of the coal soot, he saw her crouched, quiet body.

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He went along the jouncing and grinding floor of the car to her.

"WE'LL get no sleep in this one, big boy," she said.

"We don't want any sleep," he said. "We got a good rest, t'-day. I don't like th' looks o' this one much."

"Because o' them express cars?"

"Sure. Four o' them, just up ahead. Th' bulls always watch a rattler like that."

"Did you see them tractors, on th' flat car?" she asked.

"You ain't figurin' we oughta beat it up there?"

"I figure that's th' one no-good place to try. It's the first place th' bulls or th' shacks from th' caboose will hit. Too easy, under them tarpaulins out of th' wind. I guess this is th' best, dust an' all, and we can run along the train, or hop it, right from here."

"That's it."

He was squatted down on his heels, his back against the rear wall of the car. Using but a single match, and without exposing any flame or letting a live spark rise above the level of the car side, he lit and smoked his cob pipe.

"Take it easy, kid," he muttered once. "I ain't saying sleep. But take it easy. The next town is about sixty miles from where we caught this one."

"That's Dorcas, huh?"

"No. Th' next one after that is Dorcas."

Softly, slowly, he was lowering the pipe, his hand tightly clenched over the bowl. He turned it, when he had it against the bottom planks, and brought his foot over the few sparks, treading them silently out. The hand that had held the pipe went up to her shoulder. He pointed to the opposite rear corner of the car, his head raised. Then he left her, crawling forward on his stomach and elbows, keeping close to the side of the car.

He thought it was perhaps ten minutes before the man he had seen crawling down the end of the next freight car, forward, came into their gondola. That man also moved without sound, and he carried neither a lantern nor a brakeman's club. When he saw his hands, coming up over the head of the ladder, young Jack Gillis stood up, poised. But the man did not show his head or face first; he swung his booted feet down, leaping out into the open car as he landed lightly on the balls of his feet. Instantly, he swung where he stood.

"All right, buddy." Laughter came behind the low words. "Wise, ain'tcha?"

Gillis did not move. He had noted the way the man's right hand and arm were set. The man carried a gun, there in his side pocket.

"Up, buddy!" the stranger ordered.

Gillis did not speak. But the other did not move any closer to him.

"Up!" he repeated. Then he showed the gun, small and dark.

Gillis shook his head. "I ain't got nothing, fella."

"I'll tell ya that. Snap 'em up!"

JERKILY, Gillis lifted his arms. He kicked just as his hands got beyond his head, with a forward, spinning motion of his body behind the blow. But his blow was too high. He missed the knee cap, and caught the hard flesh and muscle of the thigh. Then he struck, left for the head, right for the throat, seeing the jabbing thrust of the revolver barrel.

It caught him right above the eyes, however, flatly. He went loosely back

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and down, lay there moaning and quivering, watching the dark rear of the car through his narrowed eyes. The other laughed at him, coming no closer. "I ain't going to get kicked again," he said. "Case that, Billy!—So get up, an' shell out, before I beat th' head offa ya!"

In slow words, Gillis called him several names, among them "hijacker." A hijacker, Gillis said, who was cheap enough and yellow enough to be afraid to use his gun; and to stick up a poor floater who might have a few dimes, instead of the poker game among the brakemen back in the caboose. He got only laughter for his answer; laughter and a curt "I'll have yours, anyhow, before they get it, buddy!—Now get off your tail!"

Gillis started to raise himself up on his elbows, then lashed out with his feet as he thrust with his body. He caught the other's legs with his locking ankles and feet, pulling him almost flat.

The girl was able to make a single strong, glancing blow with her club from behind. It smacked against shoulder flesh and bone. But at once the man with the gun was away and free. He knelt, swaying a little bit, gasping for breath. They saw the whiteness of his teeth as he clamped them against the panting of his breath; clamped the pain back, biting his lips.

The girl named Joey stood with her club half up, her weight upon the balls of her feet. Gillis had got up. They both stood staring at the dully white, drained face, the bright eyes of the kneeling man. So, they waited for him to fall backward, or forward on his face, and pass out.

He made small sounds in his throat; at last forced them into words. With the hand that held the gun, the gun muzzle swung down and useless for a second, he pulled himself up until he partly stood, his back against the head of the car.

Then the gun muzzle came up. It was of dark metal, so that they could hardly see it against his dark, dirty clothing. They watched his thumb as he snapped open the chamber, in one quick jerk. The brass jackets of the cartridges were brighter than the steel of the gun. The chamber clicked as he relocked it; the hammer came back under his thumb with a clean snap. He repeated what he had said.

"Shell it out!—You first, girly!"

The wind whistled and cinders spattered upon the planks as they stood there.

GRADUALLY she turned her head from him and looked at Gillis. Gillis made a small inclination of his head. He said:

"Give him th' dough you got, kid. He means it; he'll knock you off, if you don't."

She dropped the stick. Her hands rose, tremblingly. She was trying hard not to cry, and she did not cry. Then her hands went out of sight, beneath her clothing, and came forth. Each of them held a paper dollar, which fluttered up in her grasp in the wind.

"All I got," she said in a low voice. "Ya dirty rat!"

He made a gesture with the gun, in indication.

"Stick 'em in me pocket.—Here, this pocket.—An' shut off them names, too!"

When she obeyed, she saw his left arm; saw how he carried it.

"I'll know you, gimpy!" she said in a hoarse voice. "And I'll squeal to th' bulls—myself!"

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His pale, broad face was sweating as he lifted it close to hers. She raised her hand, violently eager to slap that face. Then she put up her other hand, suddenly, and caught it against his shoulder, half supporting him.

"Le' go!" he mumbled to her. "Le' go!"

But the strength and support of both her hands was not enough against his limply heavy body. He slid past her, and fell rolling on the floor of the car, the gun still in his hand.

Her terror and her natural fear were all at once too great for her, and she screamed, her hands held up to her mouth. Gillis stopped her, and put his arm around her shoulders until she was quiet and silent. He said:

"He ain't dead. He'll be all right."

She had bent down, and now she pointed to the upturned blank face, where the dark, visored cap had fallen back.

"Look," she whispered. "He ain't a grown man. He's a kid!" Her fingers went out along the twisted arm. "It's broke, and he's got it bandaged with a hunk o' cloth. There's blood, through th' cloth.—Wake him up, Jack. Wake him up!"

GILLIS had taken the gun, thrusting it back into the other's gaping side pocket. And as he did so, he could feel the two dollar bills which Joey had just put there. He slid his hand out again, turning the strong, stocky body over, so that the head was lifted a little. Now the eyes blinked and opened, stared.

"It's all right, Billy," Gillis said. "We ain't gonna hurt ya."

The pale lips, the strong throat muscles contracted.

"If ya don't, th' shacks, here, or th' yard bulls up th' line, will."

Gillis shook his head at him.

"I know ya now, fella. You're Rorky."

The body stiffened against his hands.

"You're tellin' me? Go on back an' tell th' shacks in th' caboose. Give 'em the rod. Tell 'em I took it off one o' their tough railroad bulls, down at Wachlaw.—An' give 'em th' two bucks. If ya give 'em th' dough, and the right kinda spiel, they'll let ya ride, all right. Even me. An' they're lookin' for me."

"You're sayin' too much, guy."

The man he had called Rorky could laugh now.

"Ain't you been tellin' me? Listen, then. I'm on th' lam, right. They're casin' me; an' they'll put th' finger on me, now. Every jake constable in these here towns can put it on me, now.—Yuh hear me? Any of 'em. You—ye're just a pair of punk kids. Beat it, offa this car before they catch ya stringin' with me. They might hand yuh—"

"Keep quiet, kid!"

Gillis tightened the grip of his big hands against the straining, twisting shoulders.

"You'll talk yourself into a jam. You're sick; you ain't right in your head now. You ain't got no right tellin' us these things, anyway. If them bulls catch us, they'll try to get a squeal; and this kid here is a girl. Them's the kind of guys who make a girl talk, before they're through with her."

Rorky lifted his sweaty head until he could see Joey's face. He made a grimace that he meant for a smile.

"I don't want to do you no harm, babe," he said. "You and your side partner here better scram. Beat it—while it's good. But listen, will ya? Tell yer partner to take back them two bucks.—Yuh hear me?"

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"Keep 'em," she said. "You need 'em, more than me."

Kneeling down, she pulled forth the clean hem of her dress, so that she might wipe the sweat away from his forehead, mouth and eyes.

"You just keep quiet now. Get that?"

HE seemed to hear her, for he kept quiet—for a while. Then, in a voice which held the thick, choked note of fever, he talked to them.

"I ain't out of my nut," he insisted. "I'm all right. I ain't any dumb kid. —But them dirty rats was workin' on a car—two o' them bulls, and all th' shacks on th' train. Five or six of 'em, all t'gether. An express car, see? An' they had four of us, they'd caught —outside o' Wachlaw, an' the engineer takin' it on th' highball, so's if a guy jumped he broke his legs er his neck.

"When we hit th' next burg, those birds was goin' to have th' stuff dumped off on th' line, where they could find it somewheres quick; and they was goin' to run us in for th' job. They was goin' to get up in court and say they caught us in this car, see. Stealin' th' stuff—an' a lot of the stuff already gone. Yeah; they said that. They tol' me so when I got nasty with 'em, before they brung us all together in this one car.—I ain't lyin', see? I don't care no more. But three of them other guys they caught with me, they was bums. We went back along th' train, an' we swung down inta that car. We had a fight with them crooked sons, an' one o' them detectives slugged me arm and broke it. . . ."

His voice dulled, then stopped altogether. For a short time, he appeared to sleep, or to be in a coma. Then his eyes opened and blinked at them. He tried to laugh.

"That's that guy's gun I got; I took it offa him, after he slugged me with it. A tough guy. Anyhow, he thought so.—But them other birds in th' car wasn't even that tough. When I put th' gun on 'em, they wasn't so funny no more. One of 'em swung th' lantern on th' engineer, and he come off th' highball for a little, so's we could jump it.

"That's two days ago, on that other line, down there.—Central an' Eastern, that's what they call it. Every bum on th' road, an' every town bull, has got my moniker now. I used to travel with them wild kids, up through here last year, an' they knew me some then. —Lift up me head, will ya?"

Gillis lifted it a little higher. "Keep quiet now," he said. "That's not th' way to beat any rap like that—talkin' yourself weak."

"Yeah? I can't beat that rap. Don't be like that—they'll get me here er there. But all of them shacks ain't crooked. Most of them ain't, I'd say. And most of them railroad bulls only think they're hard because they wear tin on their vests.

"Now you slide these birds back in th' caboose th' couple o' bucks you got there an' they'll let ya ride this one right into Mounter. If they find me, then, they find me—an' you ain't with me. Listen to me, will ya? Reach in there.—Yeah, right inside th' shirt. Feel that? Take it out. It ain't dough; it's my old man's Cross. The old man was a soldier, an' that's one of them Frog Crosses of War. He got it, an' he give it to me. I don't want them rats to have it; the old man wouldn't like that. And he's a good guy."

Gillis was turning the small, canvas-covered object in his fingers; then,

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slowly, he knotted the broken string loop, and put it back beneath the sweaty shirt. Rorky cursed at him in an incoherent whisper, and tried to push his hands away.

"Shut up!" Gillis said to him. "How many times I got to tell ya?—Shut up! No guy is goin' to grab off that thing, not as long as this kid and me are ridin' with you. You get me, Red? Ya get that?"

Rorky looked up at him, then aside and at the girl, and back again to Gillis.

"Yah!" he jeered faintly. "Ye're a pair o' saps! Just dumb saps!"

CHAPTER IV.

"LET'S BLOW!"

FOR a time, the tracks had left the lake, so that the train dragged through rolling, barren country. The girl and Gillis sat very still. They had pulled Rorky gently back into the rear corner of the car; made him comfortable there, with Gillis's bundle under his head. But he talked aloud occasionally, in the unconsciousness of his fever. He talked of his father, a man who had been a soldier in the Regular Army before and during the Great War. The old man had been a company sergeant, the muttered and almost unconnected words told them. And he had won his French Cross of War in his first engagement, at Cantigny. But the day before the Armistice, and after he had been through every major American engagement, while he was going back through open country, in charge of the evening's chow detail, a German machine gunner had sighted him. Rorky's father had gone down with more than twenty slugs in his body.

He had lived, and he still lived. He was in Walter Reed Hospital, in Washington. He would never leave there, until he died, however, and life was still stubborn in him.

"He's a right guy!" Rorky had said, loyally. "He takes an awful lot o' beatin'."

Rorky talked about his mother, too; they guessed she was his mother. He had lived with her, and for several years after the War, when his father had first gone to Walter Reed Hospital, they had lived in Washington, so they could be near. But before that they had always lived in New York. Both his father and his mother came from there. His mother had said she wanted to work again, and not live on her allowance from the government; she wanted to do something which would keep her busy. So they had gone back to New York, where she had got a job in a Childs' restaurant, as a waitress. She had worked there four or five years.

It was in the restaurant that she met the man she fell in love with.

"You couldn't blame her," Rorky's mumbled words said. "He was a nice fella. But it was me who had to go and tell the old man. He took it all right. He takes everything all right. So she got a divorce and married this other guy. He come from Texas, and they wanted me to go there an' live with them. But after that I couldn't like the guy. I was a Gas House kid—Twenty-Second Street's my block. I tol' 'em they could keep their Texas; I was big enough to tie me own shoes. . . ."

They had to silence him then. The girl softly put her hand down over his parched and twitching lips. A brakeman was coming forward from the caboose, carrying a lantern in his

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hand. They could see him far down the cars. Maybe, they thought, after he passed, he had wanted them to see him. For he did not stop; he did not even look toward the corner where they were crouching, as he climbed down into the car and walked through it, swung up over the forward end of it and went on toward the tender and the engine.

BUT when the brakeman came back, he slowed, standing where the ladder was.

Gillis looked up and said, "When she getting into Dorcas, shack?"

The brakeman held the lantern down so that the wind could not get at its flame. "In about ten minutes now.—What's the matter with that guy you got there? He soused?"

"No," Gillis said. "He ain't drunk."

"Yeah?" asked the brakeman skeptically. He advanced several feet, flashing the lantern. Then he swore.

"You kids is always raisin' trouble," he said. "You'll lose a guy like me my job."

His lantern rays caught across the upper part of Rorky's face and his mussed red hair. He stood still for a while, balancing to the sway of the train.

"That guy," he said finally, "is bad news. You get caught with him, an' you'll get the stuff kicked out o' you. You'll land in jail."

Gillis got up from where he had been kneeling beside Rorky.

"Listen," he said. "This kid didn't pull any job like that back there."

The brakeman shook his head. "That ain't any business of mine. Let them yard bulls—or th' sheriff—or th' court figure that one out. You know what I oughta do? I oughta herd yuh all back into the caboose now, and turn yuh right over to th' bulls when we hit Dorcas."

"That's right," Gillis said.

The brakeman was a young man; inside his canvas overall jumper, he was wearing a baseball jersey, upon which were the letters of his team. Gillis smiled at him.

"But you ain't going to do that—unless it means your job."

"No." The brakeman remained solemn. "I ain't. This one slows on th' curve, after th' first switch lights, comin' into Dorcas. He comes off his highball there, an' you can jump it. Jump it on this side, then beat it for the fence. Th' bulls usually stay down at the other end of th' yards."

"Thanks, shack."

"You thank me when you're through that fence. If them bulls catch you, an' if they come to me, I'll have to be as tough as they are."

"They won't do that, fella."

The brakeman grinned a bit. He lifted his lantern, holding it before his body and out of the wind as he began to mount the car end.

"You be sure!" he gave as a parting warning.

THE girl stood up, after the brakeman had gone. She leaned into the wind, her cap pulled down to keep the cinders from her eyes and hair. Gillis looked up at her while he was still shaking Rorky, trying to talk him back to consciousness.

"Yuh can't see th' town," he said.

"Sure I can. We're comin' in back by th' lake again."

She turned around and crouched down. Rorky was beginning to return to coherence; and he was mumbling at Gillis in a clearer and certain voice.

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"Th' shacks been by?" he asked Gillis.

"No."

"Ya lie, kid."

"All right, I lie."

"He shake youse down?"

"No. He was a right guy; a young fella."

"What'd he say?"

"He says they come off the high-ball up front when we pull into that curve, past th' switch lights."

"That's right. That's where ya hop it."

"You're hoppin' with us."

"I ain't hoppin' nowheres!"

"You heard me. Cut out the kidding, Rorky. You can walk. You can walk there. We'll get ya out through the fence."

"They got tough bulls in that yard, kid."

"The shack said that, too."

"All right, I told ya. Now let me up."

He got up alone, staggered, and caught himself against the car end. He called himself several names in a whisper that the girl could not hear; and then he was silent. He moved over to where she and Gillis stood, watching the thin, broken pattern of the lights in the town; the dull, almost shapeless shadows of the water tanks; the switch towers and freight sheds of the railroad yards, close to them now around the big, sweeping curve.

The engineer blew. Steam spurted back over them, and drops of moisture spattered against their bodies. They could feel the motion of the train slacken. Rorky stood up straight, his hands on the top plank of the car side.

"Here's where we blow," he told them. "Tail right with me. See that little car knocker's shed—with th' lantern hangin' on th' door? Right behind that is where th' hole in th' fence is. Th' yard bulls and th' shacks use it when they run out to get a beer. There's a speak right acrosst the street from there. Beat it left, when ya get out in th' street—not right. Right'll take ya right into town, past th' station. You go on first, babe."

In silence, watching the yards where lanterns and men were moving across the tangled tracks, the girl swung out over the side of the car, poised her weight for a moment on the hand ladder, then jumped, her legs already striking out. They saw and heard her as she landed lightly.

She ran slowly alongside the train, looking up at them.

"Beat it!" Rorky called at her, but Gillis was pushing him up from behind, and he had only time to say it once.

He landed far more heavily than she, lunged forward almost sprawling over the edge of a switch plate, but caught himself and came upright. Forward, up near the head of the train, and near the signal tower, men were yelling. A flash light jerked a beam around, angling upon Gillis's body just as he jumped.

BUT he was laughing as he came running across the tracks to meet them where they ran.

"Those guys is dumb!" he scoffed. "You'd think one o' them would forget about them express cars or th' flat with th' tractors, and lay back here."

Rorky's lifted face was contorted with pain; he was trying to speak, but could not.

They were opposite the car inspector's shack now, where the round lantern hung from the door handle, and suddenly a bullet cracked splintering into the corner plank. Rorky inhaled a great breath.

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"Blow!" he yelled, his head swung sidewise at them. "Scram! Those guys know me—an' want me!"

He tried to batter away Gillis's hand, but the other caught tight at his collar, pulled him on stumbling feet to the black and regular shadow of the fence. The girl was already there; she had gone flat and was crawling in the darkness, looking for the hole in the boards which gave entrance out into the street. Bullets made a repeated, whimpering smash in the wood, and splinters flicked down at her face. Then she saw the dim gap between the planks and started through.

She was on the other side and out in the street, and Gillis and Rorky were through, after her, when she saw the man across the street. She called back to the other two. The man had ducked down from the ricochetting course of the bullets. He wore a big black felt hat, pushed up in cowboy style, and they could see the shield upon his vest, under his opened coat.

He yelled at them. "All right!" he said. "Now's when yuh stop!"

Rorky's hand had gone toward his side pocket. Gillis beat it savagely down.

"Cut it out!" he muttered at him. "Th' bird is yella—or he wouldn't be yellin' that way. He's just yella enough to pull his gun an' let us have it! You watch this kid here, an' I'll—"

The man across the street had begun to draw his gun from his hip holster. He had it in his hand when Gillis was only halfway across the street.

"Stop!" he yelled at Gillis. "Git back!" Then he turned his head, seeing Rorky's gun come out.

Gillis hit him with a jabbed left to the side of the jaw, spinning him around, and then gave him an uppercut. The gun exploded in the dust of the street, and Gillis kicked it, looking down. The detective lay in a peaceful position, arms and hands and mouth open, eyes shut.

"I won't be seein' you," said Gillis; then he turned and ran on, to his left, after the girl and Rorky.

RORKY had stopped. He was down on his knee in the street. He jerked his head at Gillis.

"Scram, guy! Them monks is comin' through th' fence. Keep on—straight ahead! I'll be with ya!"

Then he saw and understood the look in Gillis's face, and cursed.

"No, I ain't going to drill any of them farmers! I'll just frighten th' pants off 'em, when they start comin' through th' fence. I'll be along; I'll meet you an' the kid down at th' corner. This time, they ain't collectin' me!"

A twisted felt hat, stuck on the end of a stick, had just been thrust through the hole in the fence, somewhat after the fashion in which a man would push forth his head. Rorky gave a jeer of laughter as he shot the hat off, moving back down the street at a slow trot the while.

Another hat was shoved out, this time with the stick not showing. Rorky watched it briefly. A man was climbing up over the fence, his revolver showing in his clenched hand on the fence top. Rorky let two bullets play along the planks, a yard or so away from the figure. There was a wild yell, and the hand holding the revolver waved back out of sight. Rorky fired one more shot at the hat on the end of the stick, and tore it spinning off. Then he hurled the empty gun far away, over the fence and into the yards,

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swung, and ran, hoarsely laughing as he went.

Gillis and the girl waited for him at the corner, beneath the shadows of the loading platform of a darkened warehouse. The girl's face was the color of ivory, pale in the shadows; and her rapid breathing sounded like sobs.

"No," she said, staring back at him, "I ain't frightened. Not any more!"

Rorky grinned. "I ain't been shot at myself before. But I got you two inta this, an' now I'll get ya out."

"How?" asked Gillis sharply.

He was looking down the long, vague expanse of the street, where the railroad detectives were now crawling out through the fence. Rorky also was watching those men. He spoke quickly:

"There's a bunch o' real tough bums—bindle-stiffs—who hang out in a jungles back up here. These railroad bulls're afraid to go near 'em. An' the town cops won't. An' neither will the sheriff."

"Just a nice place, huh?" said Gillis. "You think those guys will have flowers in their hands, when we come drifting in?"

"No." Rorky's gaze was steady upon his face. "But I told ya not to string with me, when we was back on th' rattler. Ya done it, anyway, an' you was the guy who flattened that bull, there. I don't want to see ya get kicked around fer helpin' me—stuck in the can, mebbe, for six months or a year. That won't happen up in the jungles, anyways. That's all I can tell ya."

Joey reached forward, and her hand lightly brushed Gillis's shoulder.

"Come on," she said. "Those dicks will be up this way, and they'll find us soon. They ain't going to be afraid they're gonna be shot at forever.—You're worryin' about me, now. I'll take care of myself; you ain't my governess—yet—an' I've seen bindle-stiffs before."

Gillis watched the street and the slowly stalking group of detectives, several of whom carried shotguns and rifles. He laughed harshly before he said:

"And I was th' guy who said he strung alone. Yeah!—All right, let's blow—pals!"

CHAPTER V.

TIME TO ROLL AGAIN.

THE moon was white and fading when they left the town, trotting with a stubborn steadiness. The lemon-colored first light of dawn was out across the lake, streaking through the mists, when at last they came staggering up the old woods road which, Rorky said, would bring them to the hobo hangout. The trees here had been scarred or destroyed by a fire. In the dawn light it was a desolate place, made eerie by the stark white shapes of the young birches amongst the charred trunks of the older trees.

Ever since they had left the lake, a quarter of a mile or so back, they had been climbing a long hill. It was Gillis who from time to time turned and looked back, staring through the gray mists, where he could see the dulled beams of automobile headlights.

But Rorky laughed at him. "Sure," he said, "they got cars. Those're the lights you been lookin' at; they got the town cops out after us now.—But they won't come up here."

"Yeah?" asked Gillis. His face was pale, hard and drawn. "Why not?"

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Rorky jerked his hand forward. "You'll see, when you see these guys and th' lay they got. C'me on—let's go!"

They topped the hill and went forward, more slowly now, between what had once been cultivated fields. Then, suddenly, they could smell smoke and hear voices.

The girl stood still.

"You guys go on ahead," she said.

"No."

Rorky was looking ahead. "That's all right; come on," he said.

Through the birches, and the clumped sumac, through a clump of old, twisted lilac bushes, they came forward to what had been the cellar of a farmhouse which had been burned to the ground. From the ruins of the house and the barn and the outbuildings, the excavation had been roofed over with beams and planks, and a chimney led up through the roof. Smoke, in a leaning narrow column, came through the short chimney; and between the cracks in the rough roof a dim kind of light filtered up. But the place had become silent now; the only sounds were their own.

They stopped, Rorky a pace in advance.

"Hey, One-Eye!" said Rorky in a sharp voice.

Then they saw the men. They were all about—eight or ten of them. A man in a battered derby hat and a long overcoat advanced. He had been carrying a sawed-off shotgun under his overcoat, and now he let it show in his hand.

Behind, one of the other men permitted a hound dog to let out a whimper and then a baying bark.

"Well!" said the man with the derby hat. "My friend!"

Rorky nodded. He seemed to smile.

"That's right. Yer old school chum."

The man he had called One-Eye looked past him. Then he laughed.

"This here," he said, speaking not to Rorky or to Gillis or the girl, but to one of his own kind, "is gettin' to be nothin' but a hotel.—Say, I didn't think we'd have youse back, Red."

RORKY looked over his shoulder and down the hill.

"Some o' the town cops is down there," he said quietly. "That's why I come. And brung my partners, here."

"You run a mob now, huh?"

One-Eye advanced a pace, so he could look more closely at Rorky.

"Scram!" he said. He showed his darkened teeth, smiling a little. "This ain't no hideout for you!"

Rorky made a gesture with his hand, the same gesture Gillis had seen the girl make the day before, in the sunlight by the lake.

"Cut it out, guy! Them town cops know we're here. An' they know you're here. The percentages ain't with you, if yuh get tough with us now."

"Yeah?" The evil barrel of the shotgun moved slowly in the tall man's hands.

"You heard me. You ain't tough—not as tough as you'd like t' make these kids here think—er me. You ain't going to do nothing to us. And you ain't going to kick us out."

"You ain't telling me you know too much, Red."

"I'm tellin' you I know enough, guy."

He came forward, with a rapid and long pace. He stood inside the length of the shotgun. He could grasp its barrel now, should it be raised, and

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knock it down. "Ya got another drink of smoke down there? One more, fer you, and ya'll fall down—flat."

One of the men behind laughed, with a low, cackling sound. The one-eyed man turned around and looked at him briefly.

"Red's always the smart kid, ain't he?" he asked the man who had laughed. Then he tapped the crown of the smashed derby he wore, pushing it back further on his big ears. "All right," he said, talking to Rorky. "Youse and yer partners come on down, Red, and I'll talk to them hayseed dicks. But youse'll have to fix it with us."

"I'll fix it," Rorky said.

He also smiled, a corner of his mouth pulled back. He turned and made a motion of his hand to the girl and Gillis.

"Come on," he told them. "Don't mind all that; this here One-Eye is just a comedy guy. He likes his little fun."

They left the tall one-eyed man there, the shotgun under his arm, and the hound dog close at his feet. Rorky led the way, the girl between him and Gillis, and they went around through the tall, black shapes of the lilac bushes to the rear of the foundation. Then he guided them by his voice and his hand, down through a long, curving, covered runway made of packed earth and bricks. The rough room below was big, lighted only by the fire.

The other men who had been above with One-Eye followed them down. They sat in silence, dully staring at the torn, dirty mattresses placed about the fire. The "smoke," the can which held their cheap denatured alcohol mixed with water, was passed among the men again.

Through the planks overhead, they could hear the hound dog make a whimpering noise; then One-Eye's voice. The girl and Gillis were the only ones to look up.

ONE-EYE was whistling as he came into the room from the runway. As though he highly prized his guests, he took off and carefully hung up the sleazy overcoat and the punctured hat. His head was so closely shaven as to seem bald, and in the firelight the knife slash which had long ago blinded his eye showed sharply. He wore what had once been a costly silk shirt, tight fitting blue serge trousers, and the patent leather shoes of a city man. He took up the smoke can and drank from it, holding it out to Rorky when he had finished.

"How aboutcha?"

Rorky shook his head.

"Nope; not to-night."

One-Eye laughed, and all the other hoboes near him laughed. He turned the can over; it was empty.

"Well," he said, swinging his flat, scarred face around, "I fixed that for yuh. I told them monks I never seen a rat with red hair who had th' name o' Rorky on him. Ner two other punk kids." He took his gaze off Rorky's face. "How's that for bein' a good fella, sister?"

Rorky made a gesture at him, the fingers and palm of his hand outspread.

He said, "Talk t' me."

One-Eye held the shotgun across his knees. He smoothed a palm along the cracked stock.

"Maybe yuh might 'a' told me, huh, that youse and some other birds broke inta a freight down th' line? Maybe youse think I c'n keep in with them guys in th' town, with you knockin' the heads offa them yard bulls—an' slingin' shots at 'em?"

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"It's warm in that state pen all winter, guy. And them guards will take as much graft as these fellas. I ain't broke into no freights—like a couple o' guys I know has."

"Meanin' me, huh?"

One-Eye asked that softly, his loose lips purring over the words.

Rorky shrugged his good shoulder.

"I'm not crackin' tough, One-Eye. But, this ain't no shake-down racket you got here—just because you got a few o' these dopey bums who'll let ya curse at 'em. And, I ain't no squealer. It's just that I was here last summer for a while; that's all."

ONE-EYE was silent for a while. The slow, spitting crackle of the old beam-ends in the fire held the room.

The other hoboes sat very still; two of them, old and stiff, had fallen asleep in characteristic postures, sitting upright, their feet under them.

"Look at 'em," said Rorky. He pointed. "Yuh keep 'em full o' food an' a little booze, and they do their jobs for yuh. But none o' them is real tough. They ain't lookin' for trouble—no more than me. Two drinks, an' they're through fer th' night. This ain't th' big time for you any more, One-Eye."

From his knees, One-Eye got to his feet. He stood slouched, holding the shotgun in his left hand near the breech.

"A kid like you," he said in that same whispering voice, "is tellin' me! What yuh think yuh are, a muscle man? Packin' a rod, shootin' at yard bulls, then comin' here an' trying to tell me what I am and ain't. All right. I made yer fix. Youse've been packin' a gun; youse must have some dough. Shell it!—Let's see th' color!"

The drooped, veined lid over his one eye was almost shut; he was watching Rorky's body, the youth's fatigue-lined face and that bloodied bandage.

"Come on, Red!"

Speaking, the man jumped. His hobbed shoe heel came broadly down upon Rorky's good wrist and hand, pinned and ground the hand flat, holding it there, quivering.

Sweat came out around Rorky's eyes and the distended nostrils of his nose. He looked at the other hoboes about the fire. They were laughing, watching him and One-Eye. The two old men were awake and gaping. But it was one of them who yelled at One-Eye; and wheeling, Gillis brought both his hands to the shotgun. The load in one barrel roared off into the planks above, as Gillis hit him, knocking him almost into the fire.

The men about the fire jumped, yelling. Gillis brought the shotgun across them.

"Set still!" he told them. "Keep on settin' still." Without looking away from One-Eye, he spoke to Rorky. "You all right, Red?"

"I'm all right. Sure."

"You take this gun; keep it on them bums."

"Whatcha gonna do, kid?"

"I'm goin' to give this bird his payoff; he's been askin' for it. You, I mean, guy."

He held the gun down into Rorky's hand, then he took two little sidewise steps forward toward One-Eye, crouching up out of the ashes and the log ends along the edge of the fire.

"Red brought us here," he continued. "Red's my side partner. We ain't done nothing to you. We're just on the road. This here is Red's job, but Red's hurt.—Listen. Did you tell

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them cops from the town that you ain't seen us at all, or are they layin' down the hill there now, waitin' for us, after we'd paid a fix to you?"

The one-eyed man stood loosely gathered, his small head swaying on his long neck.

"Ain't youse got a lot of questions?" he asked, with seeming amiability.

"You rat!"

One-Eye struck with both hands, and a long, circling kick of one foot. The kick caught Gillis full in the side, as he advanced. It did not stop the thrust of his body after his chopping shoulder blows. He crossed a right; a left. The one-eyed man sprawled sagging against the wet, dark stones of the old foundation, and straightened only slowly.

Gillis went to him through the group of hoboes; but they scrambled back from him, their eyes dimly alight and staring at him.

"Come on, guy!" he said to One-Eye. "I ain't got any wish to hurt you bad. But you got to talk.—You got them cops layin' for us?"

ONE-EYE had found a small, jagged stone in the foundation, and he struck with it in his hand. The blow whistled across Gillis's shoulders as he ducked in hitting; he drove the tall man up against the uneven stones of the foundation.

He stopped striking then, watching the stone as it fell from One-Eye's hand.

"They got a reward out fer th' kid —fer Red—ain't they?" Gillis asked. "And they promised you a piece of it."

He crooked his right elbow and fist back, and the man's tall, dirty body twitched, the words coming rapidly.

"I figured that," said Gillis. "So they was goin' to give you all o' twenty-five bucks, huh?" He smiled gravely. "I ain't going to go and squeal on you, fella. Red and me and the kid ain't going to go and make any squeal on you to th' State cops, so's we can square ourselves and keep outa jail. But you do any squealin'—you send any o' these rats here after us—an' you'll get worse than this. And I ain't ever made a promise like that before!"

He stood back, wiped his bloodied, skinned hands down the sides of his trousers as he looked down at the men. They stared up at him from about the fire. None of them spoke to him; he did not speak to them; he had felt their eyes upon him as he had talked to One-Eye, and One-Eye had talked to him. He moved over to where Rorky was, standing up now, supporting himself with the battered shotgun. The girl was near him, her eyes widely luminous in her colorless face.

"We roll?" he asked Rorky.

Rorky's voice was harshened with pain. "Let's go!" he said.

Outside, when they stood at the head of the runway, Gillis took the shotgun from him, opened the breech, and slid out the remaining shell. Then he dropped the gun down into the sumac, and hurled the shell far off among the birches.

"Cops or no cops," he said, "I'm through with guns!" He brought his darkened eyes to the girl's face. "You all right?"

She nodded at him. "But let's get out of here," she said. "I don't like this joint."

Below, the sun which had burned great, bright patches through the mists on the lake was beginning to spread up the slope where they stood. They stared down. In the town, they could hear a church bell ringing, dim, regu-

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lar and sweet in tone; then the crow of a rooster in some barnyard; afterward, the long screech of some factory whistle as the night watchman let off excess steam from the boilers.

"We can't head back down there," Rorky said slowly. "That's a cinch.—An' we can't go on toward Wachlaw; they'd be laying for us there."

He brought up his thumb and pointed, east and south; the way they had come the night before.

"The only thing they won't figure is that we might go back th' way we come. They'd think we was afraid to do that, because they're all after me back there, too. But there's a little town, about eight or ten miles from here. It ain't on th' line; it's right on th' lake. I been there once. We'll cut back here, through the woods. Then we c'n swing back down to th' beach, an' keep on along th' lake. They'll be watchin' for us, on th' roads—an' most anywheres.—But do ya still want to string with me?"

They were already walking away from the wrecked house and into the woods, in the direction he had indicated, and he had to run a bit to catch up with them. None of the three spoke; they walked a little apart, their heads drooping with weariness. When, from time to time, Rorky stumbled, clumsy with his pain and weakness, Gillis and the girl reached out and caught him, helping him along until he could walk again unaided.

CHAPTER VI.

BON VOYAGE!

WHERE the small cove curved out into a bald, rocky headland, they were forced to mount from the bowlders and gravel of the beach they had been following since early morning. They panted as they climbed, and several times Rorky tripped or fell. At the top, close to where their crashing footsteps had sent a mother partridge and her young scuttling off through the reddened, dry leaves, they sat down, waiting for their strength to come to them again. Rorky lay stretched out flat, his head on his hands. Over his head, the girl looked across at Gillis. She said:

"I'll be like him, pretty soon. We ain't much help to you."

"Be quiet," he said.

He was getting to his feet. For a while, she heard his footsteps through the brush and the leaves; then she could see him through the last of the bushes, out on the shoulder of the headland.

Suddenly he turned, and raised his hands high above his head in a signal to her. She raised one hand in response, and reached down to tap Rorky on the shoulder.

"Come on, kid," she said sharply as he lifted his head to look at her. "He's found somethin' for us.—Here, le' me take your arm, like that."

Gillis stood at the head of what had once been a wide path. In long, gradual loops through the brush and the bare trees, its course was marked down the slope and to the further beach. There another cove, sharp and narrow and steely blue in color, stretched out, in the clench of the rocky shore.

Back from the bowlders along the edge of the cove, they saw the sagging, rusted sheet iron of a stack; then green-molded planks and slabs, the walls and roofs of fallen-in sheds and shacks. Halfway across the cove, choking the shallow surface, lay old rafts of logs, half submerged and rotting.

"Yeah!" Rorky forced himself to

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smile. "That's th' sawmill that went bust, a couple o' years back. But them shacks and sheds is all no good; the sawmill guys got all th' good lumber out before they left. It's them that stripped this country like it is now.—But that ain't no place for us to hang out; th' other two-spot town, Baines, is only four or five miles the other side."

"You ain't seeing well," Gillis said.

Rorky stared at him. "Ya mean I don't see that old ship, out there?"

"Yeah."

Rorky smiled at him.

"Them lumber company guys wouldn't even tow her out into th' lake.—Look, th' way she's lyin'. Them anchor chains is enough t' pull her bottom er her sides out, any time. How you goin' to get out to her, anyhow?"

"On them logs. They look solid enough—fr'm here."

"Maybe. But, what you goin' to do then?"

"Stay on her. No cops would figure we was out there, like that. An' if they did, when they come out we could beat it ashore, any side we wanted to. Where else you going to stay out o' the cold to-night—an' not be cooped up inside some place?"

Rorky shook his head. He said:

"There's some truth in that. You an' One-Eye are great guys for asking questions, ain'tcha? Don't ask me no more now, though. I'll go down. I didn't even see that there ship before. It don't stand out, against th' woods."

SOME of the loose rafts of logs were still kept butting together with rusted chains. Those they crossed quite easily. Beyond, however, the big spruce and cedar balks lay sharply rising and falling upon the waves of the open lake.

"Here's where we have fun!" muttered Rorky.

He was smiling. He had stopped at the edge of the last raft, beside the girl and Gillis. With them, he looked at the old schooner. She lay careened over on her side, so that they saw the greenish copper of her gaping bottom sheathing. The three topmasts, and all the gaffs and booms and rigging, had been carried away; the planking of the hullside and deckhouses had taken on a grayish monotone, so that here, only a hundred or so yards distant, the vessel's outline was indistinct and obscure to them. Gillis said, grinning a little:

"You're right, Red. Any cop would figure that a guy who would go out and stay on that hulk was too dumb to need to be stuck in any cooler. Either that, er he'd wake up some morning down at th' bottom of th' lake."

"Let's hop it out there," said Joey suddenly. "It might sink before you guys are through talking."

Gillis went first. He took off his worn shoes and knotted their laces together; hung them about his neck. He jumped from log to log, spurning them under him with his bare, sure feet, keeping his balance most of the time only by running and leaping on. In the same fashion, they came after him. They laughed, all of them, the strong afternoon sunlight sharp upon their bodies; the splashed, shining water sharp against their feet; exhilarated by the motion, forgetting everything now, but the fact that they must keep their balance and stay upright.

Gillis gave a wild, laughing shout when he reached the side of the ship. He had gone to the slanted bow, where the slack, flaking anchor cable dragged down through the churning logs.

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Above him were the loose wire stays and chains supporting the bowsprit.

With one hand against the big cable, he steadied himself and slid his shoes back on again. Then, hand over hand, cutting his skin and flesh cruelly against the rust-roughened links, he went up the cable to where he could swing out and grasp the thrust of the bowsprit and so haul himself up aboard. His head showed to them, then, above the curved line of the side, and he yelled at them:

"Don't be a couple o' saps! Go on right around that there chain and to the other side! She's so low there yuh can almost jump up! I'll give yuh a hand with a hunk of wire, here!"

He had made a loop knot in the end of the frayed piece of wire, and they wrapped the ends of their jacket sleeves over their hands before they took hold. Thus he pulled them up; first the girl, then Rorky. They mounted the steep deck, to where he stood braced against the old galley-house, between the fore- and main-masts. He was sucking ruefully at the cuts in his hands.

"All your ideas ain't so good," she told him. "But this one I like.—You know any way we can get this back on four wheels again?"

"Knock a hole through th' bottom an' let water in," said Gillis. "Come on. Let's go see if there's even a stove left in it."

THEY went into the forward part of the ship, down into what had been the fo'c's'le. The treads of the ladder in the short companionway were rotted, and they creaked and gave under their feet. Nothing but darkness, the rustling and squealing of rats, and the foul smell of bilge met them.

"Not here!" said Rorky. "One-Eye's joint is better than this."

Aft, past the cracked butt of the mainmast, they crawled up the sagged steps of the poop ladder. Where the big brass binnacle had stood, in front of the man-high wheel, there was but a scarred hole in the outer deck planking. All the glass and brass was gone from the skylight coaming and the portholes along the trunk of the cabin. But a lock on a looped chain was on the door of the companion scuttle, and Rorky kicked that off with his heel, then went down ahead of them.

For the first time since he had been in the ship, he was silent; and the girl looked back at Gillis and smiled, whispering, "It must be all right. There ain't been any kick out of Red yet. . . ."

Rorky stood spraddle-legged against the slope of the deck in the main cabin. He was beside a wide plank table which still bore oilcloth upon it. Flanking the table, and along the bulkheads of the cabin, was a settee that had been covered with leather, where the rats had made their nests for at least several winters.

"Sits all right," she said, sitting on it. "How's th' stove, Jack?"

Gillis had raked the rusted door open, peering into the rounded fire box.

"Okay. But when they figured they wasn't going to take th' trouble to lift it up through the skylight, there, they took th' pipe, anyhow."

He slammed the stove door shut and went forward with her and Rorky. Three rooms were there, bare and small, with plank bunks, lockers beneath them, brass-lined portholes locked tight, the decks and bulkheads dry.

Silently now, they went aft again, trying the door on the far side of the main cabin. It came open against Rorky's shoulder. It was a bigger room than those forward, which had

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formerly been used by the schooner's mates and the steward. Sunlight came shafting in here, through big deadlights in the curving stern. Rough scars in the deck-head above, and in the forward bulkhead, showed where a compass and a chronometer had once been fixed, but had been ripped away for salvaging. An old rocking chair, lashed to ringbolts in the deck, was in one corner; opposite it, a chest of drawers made fast in the same way.

"It's th' captain's joint," said Gillis. "How does it look to you, kid?"

She answered instantly.

"Me, I like it. We're lucky, that's what we are. You guys can use them rooms up ahead, there. When I find something like a broom, I'll clean it all up. And when you find somethin' like a stove pipe, stick it on."

"You ain't afraid o' rats, huh?"

Rorky was holding his bruised head in his bruised and inflamed hands.

"I like ship rats better than th' kind you find in town jails.—Now, how about you fellas takin' some of that old wire that's up outside there on the deck and catchin' some fish?"

As though held by the same thought, Gillis and Rorky stopped, when they were through the doorway, and looked back at her.

"Kid," Rorky said, "you're sure a hummer!"

But she shook her head. She was smiling at Gillis. "Give him the rap," she said. "It was his idea."

CHAPTER VII.

AN OFFER OF WORK.

THEY ate, that night, two perch which Rorky and Gillis had caught, after laboriously making hooks and line out of wire and finding some slugs under a slab pile, ashore, near the old sawmill. At the mill, they knocked down part of the old stack and brought it back aboard the schooner; battered it into shape and lashed it with wire; made a rough stove pipe out of it. The fish they cooked right on top of the rusted stove top; ate them without salt, bread or anything else.

The wood they burned in the stove was some which they had ripped up from the deck planks. It was fairly dry, and it burned with a roaring noise. The thin sides of the stove reddened, and a warm, gold glow came out into the cabin against the darkness. They sat without speech upon the torn settee, staring almost unseeing into the dark, or into that soft waver of light; feeling the damp cold in their bones and bodies; realizing their only partially satisfied hunger.

But Rorky was exhausted; and he slept, soon and easily, tilted over on his side, accustomed to sleeping most anywhere. For a while, Gillis sat upright, his eyes lighting and lifting as he heard the sounds of rats, in other parts of the ship, or the clunking of the loose logs against the hullside. Then he, too, slept, his head drooped down between his knees.

She slept intermittently, but far more lightly than they. From hour to hour, she got up to fix the fire, and once she went over to examine Gillis's hands. The cuts he had suffered were swelling badly, and were already slightly infected. Softly, in a gesture which she had never made to any other man in her life, she leaned down and kissed him upon the head. Her hand stroked his shoulder.

"Yuh poor kid!" she cried. "You ain't so tough. None of us are..."

She almost cried, then; but she told herself that she was too tough to do

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that, and she could even bring herself to smile a little.

Down in the side pocket of her jacket, she could still feel those two dollar bills. She folded them and refolded them tightly, sitting there half asleep, waiting for the dawn.

When morning came, at last, she was ready. She had washed herself carefully, cleaned and fixed her hair, taken off the man's suit of dungarees which she wore, and now she stood forth in the rumpled but quite spotless muslin dress which she had worn beneath.

Once, before she left them, still deeply sleeping, she looked down at the clumsy, huge pair of men's shoes she wore, remembering that she had promised herself that with these two dollars she would buy herself a pair of slippers and stockings—not food, and not even shoes until she had a job.

Gillis tossed and mumbled in his sleep, as she watched, sitting up for a moment almost as though he was about to awaken; and she ran silently up the ladder to the deck, stripped her shoes off at the sagging rail, leaped easily down onto the logs and went along them toward the shore and the little village which Rorky had said was behind the headland to the east.

It was past noon when she returned. She saw them for a moment before they saw her, through the trees along the shore. They were sitting hunched up on the edge of the cabin skylight, and she could hear the harsh, angry muttering of Rorky's voice. She let slip to the ground the big paper-wrapped parcel which she carried, and stood there for an instant, getting her breath.

Then they saw her, and yelled at her. She was too tired to yell back; she could only raise a hand to them before she started that cautious, perilous trip across the logs to the ship.

THEY helped her up across the rail and to the sunny after deck, and then waited, staring at her and at the parcel in her hands.

"Don't be like that!" she said in a husky whisper. "That was my own money..."

Then, because she did not know any more to say, and lacked the strength to speak, she handed the parcel over to Rorky. There was medicine in it, and food; dried beans and flour and bacon, tea, and a nickel package of tobacco with a sheaf of papers.

"We're partners," she said, wanting to break the silence that held them. "You can pay me back, once you've got yourselves fixed up. Maybe you can find some work."

She did not want to look at their faces; she did not want to stay there any longer, while their strained and embarrassed silence held them; and so she got up and went down the companionway to what had been the captain's cabin, shutting the door after her and throwing herself down on the bunk. She wanted to cry, but she could not.

Finally, sleep came to her, and when Gillis's hammering on the door awoke her, darkness was in the room, and through an after porthole she could see the rim of the moon.

They waited for her to speak, when she came out into the main cabin, and she said:

"I never saw a fella who was a real good cook yet."

She moved over to the stove, where one of them or both of them had placed freshly caught fish in Gillis's Tommy can, with a little flour and some of the bacon. They laughed at her, and she looked up and stared at them.

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"What's so funny?" she asked. Then she stood very still, understanding. "You got work?" she said in a very low voice, facing the stove again, her back to them.

"That's it, kid!" It was Gillis who spoke, a suppressed elation in his voice. "Some o' the luck is goin' the other way. We was down on the logs fishin' this afternoon, and we seen a guy comin' along through th' brush. An old guy. He ain't got any gun, but some o' these deputy sheriffs out here ain't got any guns, and we didn't like his looks. Pretty soon he comes down to th' shore, and he yells at us. We figure he is a sheriff then, an' that what we got to do is go in, and get close up on a guy like that. . . ."

Gillis paused, and although she did not look at him, she knew that he was smiling.

"Yuh remember this morning," he went on, "when you was going down that woods road into that town? Yuh passed a place where there's a kinda farm, right on th' lake. With a lotta sheds and stuff down on the beach. Well, that's this guy's place."

She turned from the stove, in her hand the sharp, clean stick she had been using as a fork.

"What guy's place?" she demanded.

"This old Swede's. He farms th' land back along here. But that's a boat yard he's got there; he usta be a sailor, on th' Lakes. He lives all alone, over there; his kid's in the hospital. The kid's a sailor, too, an' he got both his legs broke when a winch cable broke on him, this summer when he was on a ship. This Swede seen you this morning, when you was goin' along by his place, into town. He's comin' over here to-night; Rorky and him and me got a proposition."

Rorky was rolling a cigarette. He licked its fold into place as he spoke.

"You and him, yuh mean," he corrected.

Gillis softly laughed. "Rorky's been tryin' to kid me all afternoon. He says he ain't going to hang around here and do no work like that."

"What kind of work?" she asked.

She had gone back to her cooking again. Gillis pushed out a hand in a gesture.

"That don't matter; we ain't sure ourselves yet," he said.

She nodded, flipping over a fish in the sputtering pan.

"Come on and get it!" she told them, poking the crisply browning fish. "There it is!"

THE Swede was a diminutive old man with a brown, bony face. On his head was a faded felt hat which had intricately designed air-holes cut in the sides. He smoked a small black clay pipe, and chewed Copenhagen snuff at the same time, hardly ever taking the pipe from his mouth as he talked. He came alongside the schooner in a big skiff, and they saw his lantern, heard his rowlocks, and then his oars, bunting in among the logs.

All three of them went out on deck to meet him. He came aboard silently, hauling up after him on a line a big, bulky object wrapped in a tarpaulin. When that was on deck, he laughed and spoke, his pipe tilting up.

"Donkeys' breakfasts," he said. "Mattresses—fer sleepin' on. Old vuns, I get outa this schooner v'en lumber fellers is t'rough vit' her. Now, I yust bring 'em back.—Tarpaulion, I don't vant, too. Mebbe it rain sometime, hah? T'en you can rig it over skylight, keep kinda dry."

He stopped speaking and went limp-

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ing up the deck, his felt-topped rubber boots thumping on the loose planks. They stared after him, and Rorky spoke.

"I don't like th' guy," he said in a low voice. "He's screwy. What's he doin', foolin' around with us, like this?"

Gillis reached out and put his hand hard against Rorky's shoulder.

"You shut yer head," he ordered. "Listen to him, anyhow, will ya?"

Rorky grinned.

"All right," he said. "Sure. He gives me a laugh.—An' it don't look like there was much to be afraid of."

The Swede sat on the end of the settee, close to the stove, and refilled his pipe. He held his package of tobacco out to them, but Gillis pointed to the package which the girl had bought, and the Swede slowly nodded.

"You fellers vant vurk?" he said. "You vant vurk for me?"

Gillis sat close to Rorky. He looked at him.

"Yeah," he said. "But maybe you don't know that th' cops up in Wachlaw is lookin' for us."

The Swede wagged his head.

"I know t'at. But it don't matter. You fellers is vurkin' for me, you're all right. No cops's goin' to bother you den. I'm honest feller; you're honest fellers; an' I tell sheriff so. T'at sheriff he's my cousin."

Rorky grinned and winked.

"Glad to meet ya, mister," he said. "But how about this here work?—What kinda work?"

"Fishin'. Choppin' vood fer me. Mebbe vurkin' down in my yard vit' me, on coupla yobs I got t'ere. My boy, he does t'at, but he von't be outa hospital until spring." He took out the pipe and spat against the stove. "I ain't got any money, see? Nobody here has got no money—not t'is here year. But I give you food—all t'e food you need—an' I get you varm clothes, down at the store. You catch plenty o' fish; you help me vit' them yobs I got; I pay you v'en I get paid."

He cocked the short pipe up in the side of his mouth and looked around the cabin; at the bulkhead and deck planks, the shattered skylight above.

"T'is vun," he said, "she ain't gonna be bad home fer winter. You fix her up. I show you how. Mebbe ve can sell her in spring, fer barge.—Cheap, sure; but t'at gives us all some cash, huh? I know; I been sailor, bosun, here in lake ships, an' down on deep vater, long time in big vind-yammers."

He took out the pipe and spat, sitting there silently, looking at the stove.

"Yeah," Rorky said. He had his mouth pulled back in a sour grin. "But, all of them is only promises, you been makin'."

THE Swede looked at him mildly. "You fellers is young," he said. "I don't know you. But I got boy like you, myself. T'at gear I brung aboard—you find blankets in there, an' ax, some more food, bacon, an' potatoes. It bane gettin' cold, pretty soon now. You better be gettin' vurk, hah—or you better be goin' to yail."

He got up, and gently struck the heel of his tobacco out from the pipe, into the open fire box. Then he nodded to them, to the girl, to Gillis and to Rorky, and went silently up the companion ladder and along the deck. They heard his rowlocks and his oars as the skiff bumped its way out through the logs. They sat and listened to those sounds, then the girl spoke:

"Maybe we ain't partners, after all.

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But I tossed all the dough I had in th' pot to-day—and that's a good old guy."

Rorky swore, softly. He got up and paced the cabin, rapidly and nervously. He stared around at them, his redly bearded face tightly drawn, in sharp lines.

"I ain't going to say no," he said. "I ain't a bum who backs out on his partners."

"No," said Gillis quietly, "you ain't no bum at all."

Rorky stopped before him and laughed.

"All right, wise guy!" he jeered. "But I ain't been in any one place for more than two weeks at a time, for the last three years—and you ain't! Just try stickin' around this place for five-six months at a crack, an' see how far yuh get!"

The girl whose name was Josephine Crain looked up at him.

"You willin' to try, Red?"

He made a grimace with his mouth and eyes.

"Sure!" he said, after a moment's hesitation.

"Okay." Her face was very grave. "Let's give it a try, then. . . ."

CHAPTER VIII.

DAN'L BOONE.

NONE of them had seen cold like that which came during the next week. In one night it descended upon them, and they were unable to sleep. They came out from their rooms, dragging after them the thin blankets which the Swede had given them, to rebuild the fire in the stove and huddle about it. Outside, the wind slammed the ship; and what had been rain earlier now had the soft, quiet thickness of snow. The ship creaked and made sounds which were almost human. Ice was forming in against the hull; they heard it surge and nudge and crackle along the old anchor cables and the copper-bottom sheathing. Down through the tarpaulin, which was slapping and rising in the wind, snow slid and fluttered to the deck; hissed wetly on the stove.

Suddenly Gillis threw his blankets away from him and stood up.

"Come on," he said. "There's water in th' valves o' that there pump th' Swede brought aboard; this cold'll crack it wide."

"Who cares?" Rorky sat with his blankets pulled up to his chin, and his voice was muffled. "You ain't nuts enough to go out and pump the bilge now, are ya?"

From the door, Gillis gave him a slow smile.

"I ain't goin' to freeze to death here," he said.

He had been working at the long steel rocker handle of the old-fashioned bilge pump for what he thought to be about five minutes when the other two came out on deck and forward to join him. The girl carried a coffee can which gave off a white cloud of steam in the cold and the snow, and Rorky carried the pile of blankets. The pump which the Swede had installed was to clear out the fo'c's'le, the hold, and the false bottom underneath it, as he had explained to them; they could work the ship back onto a more even keel and thus avoid the danger of having a big ice floe keelside the ship right over some night, and drown them all in their bunks. The long rocker arm had two handles; Rorky waited his moment, after he had put the blankets down, and then he caught onto the free end, right in time with Gillis.

They pumped steadily, in unison,

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feeling the blood warm through their veins; the first sweat as it began to form on their chests. Their breaths shortened, and then they got their second winds. They began to sing, unconsciously beating out their strokes to the rhythm. The pump valves sucked and hissed, the handles clanking, the thin stream of water nearly silent as it slid down the old vessel's side and into the snow.

Where she sat on the hatch, her blankets about her, the girl got to her feet and walked over to Gillis.

"I spell you now, Johnny?" she said.

He grinned at her.

"Nothing doing, kid."

"Yeah! This deal is three-handed.—Go get yourself a swig of coffee and a smoke. Then I'll spell Red. I don't want to freeze any more than you."

THEY worked until after dawn like that, the girl spelling them in rotation. They took their jobs at the pump for a few minutes at a time, and in between went aft to the cabin for more coffee. The dawn was dull and yellow, although snow still drifted down the wind; but the bitterest edge of the cold had gone from the air, and the howling of the timber wolves back in the brush had stopped.

Across the pump, Gillis and Rorky looked at each other. The girl was nodding in sleep, where she sat in the wad of blankets on the hatch edge.

"Enough?" asked Gillis.

"This ain't no six-day bike race, sure. Let's go eat. — Here's the Swede."

The Swede wore red mittens, which hung from a cord around his neck, and a raccoon cap over which the moths had worked during the summer months. He came walking sure-footedly across the smooth new ice, three long poles over one shoulder, a pick ax over the other.

"T'at's good idea!" he yelled up at them. "I t'ink mebbe I fin' you all froze stiff, in bunks."

Rorky's snow-stiffened eyelashes almost met.

"It ain't your fault," he said.

But from behind, Gillis gave him a sharp poke between the shoulder blades.

"Shut up, will ya?" he ordered. "Who's feedin' us now?"

Rorky swung on him, swiftly, viciously his head down over one shoulder, his hands up and out.

"Listen, mug, you an' the kid an' me are partners.—But no shovin' or haulin', or I'll beat yer ears in! I been workin' for that screwy Swede for ten days now — hard — an' I want a little dough for it."

"For what, Red?"

Gillis stood with his hands by his sides, as though he had not seen the position which Rorky's body and hands had taken. Rorky butted him roughly in the shoulder, as he moved past him.

"That's *my* business, smack. You mind yer own!"

The Swede was already inside the main cabin, thawing out his mittens and helping the girl get breakfast.

"Cold, hah?" he asked them as they came in. "But, t'is here is time fer catchin' fish. I bring gear along, vit' me.—I show you fellers, after you finish chow."

"Spring it now, gran'pa," said Rorky, leaning against the after bulkhead. "What's a guy gotta do? Cut a hole in th' ice, then sit there, waitin' all day, an' pullin' out fish?"

"Yah! So!—But feller can build fire, he t'inks he needs one."

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"Me?" Rorky flashed his teeth in a smile. "No ice-choppin' an' no fishin' fer me.—Listen. You got five bucks on ya?"

The Swede looked at him from the bowl of the pipe. He said:

"You been vurkin' like good man, Red, over my place. An' here, too. But I ain't got no money—no. I tole you fellers t'at, before. For what you vant money?"

"There's timber wolf back in there." Rorky was looking out a porthole toward the whitened shore. "An' deer.—A guy with a coupla traps and a gun could mebbe pick up some dough, back in there."

The Swede nodded his head at that. He revolved the stem of the pipe between his teeth.

"My kid, he's got vulf traps; I got twelve-gauge gun. But—"

His small, pale eyes went to Gillis's face.

GILLIS had been sitting on the settee, examining one of the fishing poles and lines which the Swede had slid down into the cabin through the skylight.

"I ain't the guy to tell you no, Red," said Gillis. "It's just that the kid and me and you are all partners together, and we told this guy we'd work for him."

"I'll fix that with him."

"Yeah, maybe you will.—But I ain't so sure about you, bangin' around back in them woods with a twelve-gauge, Red."

"Why not? Ain't we got need of warm clothes, around here—an' more food than this guy can ration us? Ain't we got need fer glass in that skylight, so's we can keep this place warm, an' a little o' the snow out? Listen, I ain't so much of a slick city kid as you think. I been gandyin' around out here in the sticks for a couple o' years now. I know a trap when I see one—an' how to set it. And I ain't never shot no farmers or cows for deer, yet; nor no dogs for foxes. When I was just about big enough to stick me neck over the counter and ask the suckers just how much they was goin' to fall for, I useta work in a shootin' gallery, on Third Avenue. I got fired, sure, after about a year. But that was for usin' up more ammunition on th' guy that run th' joint than I was gettin' in pay. Now you know that, what do you say.—Ain't what I said right? All them things I spoke about we need, and all o' them costs dough."

"Sure, that takes dough, all right. And we need them things. But other guys has probably been runnin' traplines, back in the woods. And I ain't so sure about you and a gun, Red."

He got up then. Rorky had crossed the cabin to stand in front of him.

"What you proving, Jack?"

"You ain't going to raise no trouble, if you get a gun?—You ain't going to turn wise?"

"No! What th'—?"

"That's a promise, Red?"

For an instant, Rorky's lips met and whitened; color rose thickly in his cheeks. Then he said:

"Yeah, a promise. I don't go borryin' any trouble with a gun.—But I'm no fella to go sittin' all day over a fish-hole in th' ice."

Gillis kept most of his smile back.

"All right, Dan'l Boone!" he said. "But wait till the guys back on Third Avenue hear that!"

AFTER breakfast, when the Swede left, Rorky left with him, giving a short, almost openly mocking wave of his hand to the girl and

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Gillis, where they sat on twin boxes across the square-cut hole in the ice. Their feet were wrapped in blankets, their lines, set on bobbins, went trailing down into the black water near them, the long poles at their sides.

For the rest of that day, they did not see him. He came aboard long after darkness had dragged in across the lake. And then he spoke but briefly to them, while he ate the supper which Joey had saved for him. And rising from the meal, he chose his blankets from the pile and went forward into his room.

In the morning, however, when the girl hammered on Gillis's door to awaken him, Rorky was already gone; and an empty plate and the coffee pot on the hot stove showed that he had cooked breakfast for himself.

For the next three weeks—almost a month—they saw little more than that of him. He spent all his days, and sometimes his nights, in the woods and away from the ship. But after the first four days he brought back with him four prime martens, and a red fox.

"More, an' better, of 'em," he said, smiling swiftly. "Th' Swede says he knows how t' skin an' cure 'em, and which house to send 'em to in Minneapolis. I stopped by his joint on th' way in.—How's fishin'?"

Gillis's eyes carried small, bright lights.

"Fishin' ain't all it's supposed to be," he admitted. "But wait until ya've shot yer first bear, an' then maybe we'll tell ya. . . . "

"I ain't heard you laugh," said Rorky.

"And you ain't going to."

Gillis seemed not to be looking at him, but Rorky's eyes were on the girl. Then Rorky got to his feet, ruffled one hand through his thick red hair, in a characteristic movement, and pulled his cap down.

"I'm goin' down and watch th' Swede fix them skins. That's somethin' that's harder than cleanin' fish," he said.

"Beat it!" Gillis told him. "You ain't wearin' leg irons—yet!"

When Rorky had gone, and they could hear the notes of his gay whistling far over the ice, in the clear night air, the girl looked up and over the stove from where she sat in the rocker. "You ain't jealous, are yuh, Jack?" she asked.

He did not answer her; he did not look at her. He merely sat there and rolled a cigarette, and she smiled at the top of his head.

"Ya needn't be," she said softly. He kept on rolling the cigarette, as if he had not heard.

"Yeah?" he asked, after a time.

CHAPTER IX.

SHOW-DOWN.

IT was the second week in February when the Swede came down with influenza. He and Gillis had been working hard for days, calking seams and tarring down rigging on one of the two smart little two-masted schooners he had up on the ways in his yard. Quitting just before night, they had walked miles across the ice to pick up their catches of fish.

The Swede, cursing in Swedish, slipped and fell flat on his face with weakness, while walking back to his house under a load of fish. Gillis dragged him most of the way home, shoved him into bed with a dose of quinine, the only medicine in the house, and then trotted back across the ice

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to the ship. The girl was alone aboard; Rorky had not come in from the woods yet.

"Come on," he told her quietly. "Th' Swede's down with the 'flu—an' bad, too. I got to get into town and get th' doc out.—Leave this junk here. No guy is gonna swipe it!"

Dawn was flaming strongly against the sky, when he came clanking back into the Swede's farmyard in the young village doctor's Ford. The girl and Rorky sat in the kitchen. The girl was asleep in her chair by the long stove, and Rorky let them in.

"She ain't so good, herself," Rorky told the doctor, after they had come out from the Swede's room. "She almost dropped down flat on th' floor, a coupla minutes after I come in. You know, we're th' guys that's been livin' up on th' schooner in th' cove. That ain't no real health resort."

The doctor nodded to that, moving to where the girl sat, and lifting up her wrist to feel her pulse.

"Either of you boys married to this kid?" he asked as he let her wrist drop back.

They did not answer that.

"Well, she's got it, too," he added. "She's just about as sick as the Swede."

Holding his pad of prescription forms against the wall, he wrote slowly, then turned and put the forms into Rorky's hands. He picked up his mittens and his drying bearskin robe, looked back at them when he had the door open.

"I'll be back late this afternoon. You can't get this stuff in th' village; you got to go to Wachlaw."

Rorky turned the sheets of the blanks in his hands for perhaps five minutes before either he or Gillis spoke.

"I ain't got no dough," Rorky said slowly then. "I spent it all, when I got that mackinaw for th' kid, and them new boots. And you ain't got none.—This Swede got any?"

THEY searched the house, thoroughly. The Swede, they found, had been absolutely truthful in his statement; the total sum of money which they found in the house was seventeen cents, and an Imperial German fifty-mark note.

"That don't buy medicine, huh?" asked Rorky. "Nor th' right kinda food fer 'em."

He had hung his coat and his cap and gloves in a corner behind the stove. He took them down and put them on, lifted from a corner by the door the Swede's old twelve-gauge gun.

Gillis got up suddenly and walked to the door; stood against it.

"Listen, Red. This ain't worth anything—like that."

"Like what?"

"You know.—This is a bad jam, but there ain't no reason to make a worse one."

Without violence, Rorky pushed him back from the door.

"Stay here, sap!" he said. "You're th' guy for stayin'!"

He almost slammed the door upon Gillis's fingers, and laughed back as Gillis opened the door to call after him.

Gillis had been on his feet all day, and he was reeling with weariness when Rorky got back. Rorky's clothing had been torn by snags of brush in the woods, and snow stains were high against his boots and trousers. But he carried in one pocket all the medicine which the doctor had ordered, and his breath was strong with the odor of hard cider. He said:

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"That's a nice town, Wachlaw. Nice coppers they got. Not a one of 'em even stuck his neck out at me.—Now, go lie down before I push yuh down. I'll talk to th' doc'."

Through the lightness of his nervous, over-exhausted sleep, Gillis heard the doctor come and go; heard Rorky talking with him; then Rorky, laughing and singing alone in the kitchen while he cooked supper for himself. Presently, he heard Rorky's voice, talking to the girl, and he got up from the bed, pulled his shoes and his coat on, pushed his hair back from his eyes and went out. The girl was awake and conscious; Rorky stood in the door of her room and talked to her, laughing at his own words.

"What's th' matter?" Gillis asked thickly, sleep still heavy upon him.

Rorky lifted his head to look at him.

"Th' kid here," he said, "got th' idea she hears some guy movin' around outside. I told her she was nuts, an' I was gonna shut th' door agin. But—"

The girl gave a low, quick screaming sound. She was sitting half upright in the bed, and she was pointing out the window, where the blue starlight glanced up from the snow.

Rorky and Gillis stood shoulder to shoulder while they stared. Out by the black shape of the barns and the corncrib, they could see three men, crouched down against the hard snow; and walking between the shadows of the barn and the house, his strides long and easy, another man who wore a long overcoat and a smashed derby hat and carried a sawed-off shotgun under his arm.

It was Gillis's desire at that moment to hit Rorky full in the face. He kept from doing that, however, and he held his hands tightly locked together in front of him, seeing that Rorky smiled at him and at the girl.

"You double-crossing—!" Gillis began.

BUT Rorky was out of the room. They heard the hammers click as he picked up the shotgun from its corner in the kitchen. Then the latch of the kitchen door squeaked as it was lifted.

One-Eye's footsteps made regular crunching sounds over the snow outside.

"Stand away, hot-shot!" That was Rorky. "I only want to see your pan once a day."

The footsteps on the snow outside the kitchen door had halted. Over Rorky's shoulder, Gillis could see One-Eye; the man's face; the light blue rims of the muzzles of his gun. The rims were low; they were moving jerkily higher as One-Eye spoke.

"You thought I wouldn't find youse. Hey, Red? Thought, mebbe, I was yella, an' would let youse hijack me outa my wad—an' then just walk into town an' out again. Listen, Red—"

"I ain't listenin' to nobody, guy! But get this— Back up! Back it up, now!"

One-Eye ducked down, right against the snow, as though away from a physical blow. His long arm, in its ragged overcoat sleeve, flapped twice, convulsively, pulling around the barrels, then the triggers of his gun. His shot raked splinters through the door which Rorky kicked almost shut with his foot, as he jumped back.

One-Eye came on, against the door, and knocked it open with his gun butt. He swung the gun butt down at Rorky, half-crouched behind the door. Rorky shot him dead, right in the doorway.

The force of the double barrels made

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One-Eye twist back in a kind of staggered dance, for five or six paces, the feet shuffling under the contorting body. Then he screamed once, and toppled sidewise on his face and an outflung arm.

Rorky tried to shut the door behind him, as he went through it, shoving shells into his gun breech with his free hand; but Gillis was right behind him. Gillis's hand caught Rorky's shoulder and spun him. Rorky's face was a terrible mask.

"Cut it out! Didja think I wanted to bump him?"

"You went and broke yer promise to me and the kid, didn't ya?—And stuck him and his gang up; rolled 'em for their dough?"

Rorky was looking away off into the apple trees behind the barn, where the hoboes who had come with One-Eye had vanished.

"Who gets th' rap, anyway? Me, don't I?—Go on, be your age!"

Gillis was trembling so that it was difficult for him to speak.

"Ye're in love with her, too, huh?" he asked.

Rorky made a grimace that was like a little smile at him.

"Ya'd make a swell fortune teller!" he scoffed. He held out the gun, barrel first. "Here, grab onta this, an' get inside th' house. I got to dump this, out in th' lake. I'd ask ya to help me, but somebody's got to stay with them two—and I'm the guy who plugged this rat. After he'd done his best at pluggin' me, though."

Gillis flung the shotgun as far as he could throw it, to the roughly piled shore ice. It exploded when it landed there, and shot whinnied over their heads and back into the planks of the barn. His red-shot eyes were held for several seconds on Rorky's face.

"Yeah," he said in a tense voice. "Go stuff him down a hole in th' ice. And go stuff yourself down with him. Because when ya come back, you'll wished ya had."

He did not wait; he did not look up again. He swung, and turned back into the house.

HOW long Rorky was gone Gillis did not know; it seemed to him a very long time. In that interval, the girl tried to talk to him, attempting to tell him to let Rorky be, not to do anything more at present. One-Eye, she whispered, was dead anyway. Gillis's only answer to her was to remain silent; he was waiting for Rorky.

Rorky halted inside the doorway, after a little, and shut the shattered door behind him. He asked:

"Still lookin' for it, Jack?"

Gillis was stripping off his jacket and his sweater.

"This ain't because o' her. It's because o' you," he said.

Rorky merely laughed.

"Ye're a liar, Jack!" he said. "Th' kid'll tell ya that, herself. Ye're jealous o' me — because I been makin' dough and gettin' things done, when you just been muggin' around."

"That makes us a pair o' liars," said Gillis, in a quiet voice. "Remember th' promise you made to th' kid and me, on th' ship, about usin' that gun?"

"Ah, pipe down!"

Rorky's blow at Gillis's jaw was swift and certain. Gillis got up without haste from where he had been knocked against the cold stove. He walked forward into the center of the room, shook the blood out of his eyes from the cut over one eyebrow, and feinted two long lefts for Rorky's head. He did not believe that Rorky

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would come in after them; and he was very surprised when Rorky did. Then he fought the other man open-armed, fiercely and eagerly, nearly toe-to-toe. He chopped and raked Rorky with a slashed tattoo of his somewhat longer arms. He spun him from right to left, got him against the wall, and held him there as he hit.

Rorky struck him a number of times, but Gillis did not feel that much; and finally he saw Rorky's face, sliding down in front of him, bobbing along the wall, and he knew he could no longer hold it up to hit it.

Rorky rolled over on the floor; Gillis gaped down at him.

"Say ya lie!" he commanded. "Say ya lie!"

But Rorky was out—cold and quiet.

Gillis made one stumbling step past him, tripped and fell across him, lay like that and put his bloody head in his arms and slept.

The girl awoke him. She called to him repeatedly from her room, and he brought his eyes open and looked at her. She said several sentences slowly. That Rorky had gone, a couple of hours ago; that he had just got up and gone, without saying a word to her. And the Swede, she said, was better. He had called to her from his room and asked her how she was, and to tell her he was better. He, the Swede, had evidently been so sick last night that he had not heard the firing; at least he had said nothing about it.

"But, what're we goin' to do now, Jack?"

HE looked out through the window, where snow twisted in slow pearl-shaded veils.

"I ain't going out in this snow and find any sheriff, even if it is th' Swede's cousin. Rorky's outa here anyhow, now; an' with this snow, if th' Swede or th' doctor says anything—why, Rorky just hit his gun with his foot, an' it went off into th' door. Rorky, if they ask us that—Rorky's out hunting. . . ."

He had been moving forward as he spoke, and now he stood in the doorway of her room, looking down at her where she had got herself up from the bed. She was wrapped warmly in blankets and a comforter, and was seated in a rocker.

"I keep my promises," he said. "I'm still workin' for this Swede."

A faint smile came over her small, pale face, and her eyes lighted.

"So am I, Jack. But—you still stringing with me?"

He spoke in a very low voice. "Sure," he told her.

"And, you was jealous of Red, too?"

"Yeah." He whispered now. "I was that, all right."

She smiled, as he smiled at her; then she raised her hand.

"Th' Swede's callin'," she said. "He's been asleep, since he was talkin' to me, I guess; an' now he wants his medicine, or wants to eat.—You'll be cookin' for a couple o' sick guys for a week or so yet, Jack."

He stared back at her gravely from the kitchen, and muttered slowly:

"That's somethin' I won't mind much. . . ."

CHAPTER X.

"AM I A LIAR?"

IT was the last week in April, and the ducks had come back north. The seagulls were screaming over the lake, and the buds were small and green on the birches. That was when

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they saw Red Rorky again. The Swede, the girl, and Gillis, were all working on the ship, finishing the last of the red-lead painting overside, when they saw him coming across the logs toward them. He wore a clean suit of dungarees, and a derby hat whose visor he had cut away from all but the front. He came deftly along the logs, right up under the staging where they sat painting. He stared up at them, though at first he did not smile. Then he spoke, to Gillis:

"Don't laugh. I wouldn't 'a' come back, unless ya'd hammered th' ears off me — and to find out about that other job. I'll take the rap now, Jack."

Gillis placed his paint brush flatly across the top of his pot and smiled down.

"There ain't any rap, Red. That's all right; forget it.—Where you bound for?"

Rorky took the derby from his red head, and with it he pointed back toward the shore.

"I been back on th' block—Twenty-Second Street. Comin' this way, I ran across some o' them kids, out in th' jungles. They ain't bad kids. There's six o' them.—I says to 'em, 'String with me, an' maybe I can line ya up with a little clean work, along with a Swede and a guy named Gillis and his wife.' So they come, see.—But, what you callin' this tub now?"

The Swede grinned until his ears wagged. "She's t'e Roll an' Go. A good vun, hah?—You kids all t'e tam, last vinter, I hear you sayin', 'Let's roll!'—'Let's go!'—Yeah, an t'at's name on ole sea chantey, 'Roll an' Go.' But, where you rollin' now, Red, you find t'em kids c'n have a good yob here, on schooner?"

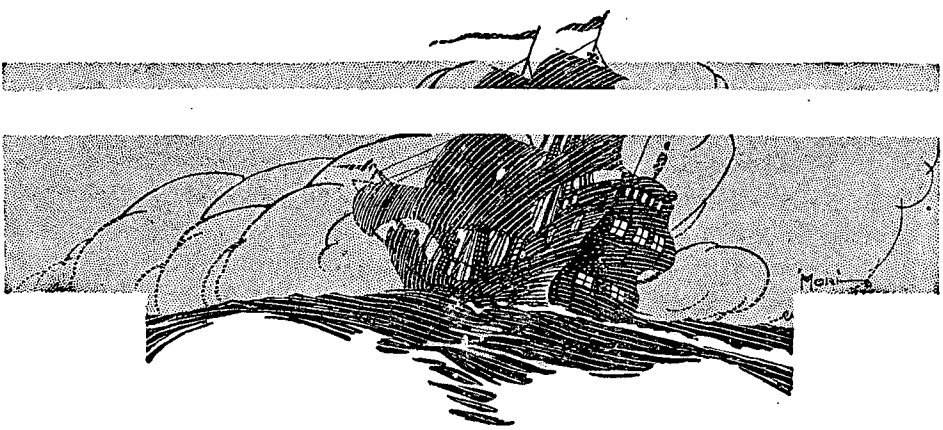
Rorky had found the end of a stage line. With it, he swarmed up so that he sat beside them on the paint-spotted plank, between the girl and Gillis.

"Me?" he said. "I'm rollin' again. What's a guy like me gonna do, stick aboard one boat all th' time?—An' they got recruitin' open in th' Army?—My old man was a soldier; he'd like that.—So would Red."

His fingers slid forth and caught for an instant about Gillis's and the girl's shoulders, before he reached for the stage rope and started below again.

"A guy in th' Army, there, catches me with a gun in me hands, he ain't goin' to knock me ears off.—Ain't that so, Jack? Er am I a liar?"

THE END



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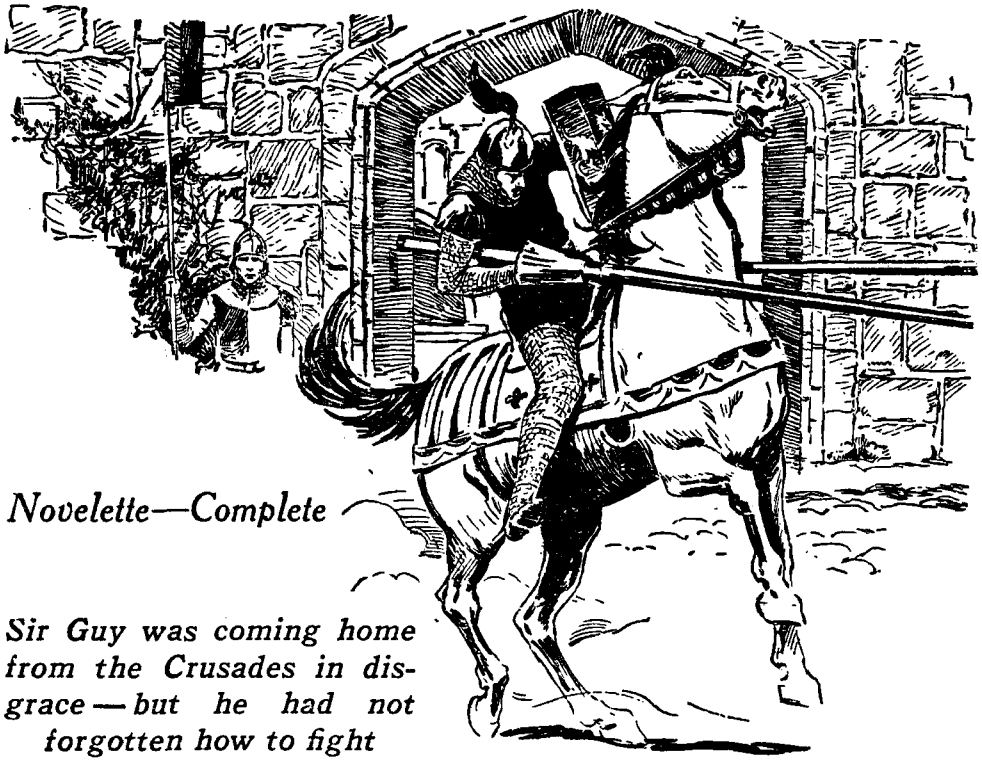
The Knight in Crimson

By DONALD BARR CHIDSEY
Author of "The Sin Ship," "Hassan's Killers," etc.



Novelette—Complete

Sir Guy was coming home from the Crusades in disgrace—but he had not forgotten how to fight

CHAPTER I.

CLASH OF GALLEYS.

NOTHING was visible but sea and fog, and the sea was thick, dark, oily, without a trace of spray or foam. A pretty homecoming, Guy reflected. He wrapped his lambskin tippet closer about him, shivering.

"'Tis pirates, as sure as Satan hath a tail," the master said, "else they'd have trumpeted us ere this."

Guy nodded. "I had thought to be finished with cutthroats," he said.

"Oh, thou'lt find as many of them here as ever there were! These be from Sussex, likely. I'll try to slip them, but—" He shrugged. "Speed they always have, and devilish sharp ears, milord."

"I'll don my mail," Guy decided. "Matt!"

The armor made him chillier still. It was wet, clinkless, lank, and clung to his body. And Matthew, his varlet, whether from fear or from cold, trembled at the task of harnessing.

Guy was annoyed, but not alarmed. They would be outnumbered; but these mariners and oarsmen were not unaccustomed to slaughter far from shore, and surely desperation would lend them whatever courage they might lack. As for himself, it would be a

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strange thing if after six years of battling Yusuf Saladin's best warriors he should be troubled on his return by a galleyful of scum from the Channel ports.

He strode to the stern. The boat, twisting and turning, wriggling through the mist, was curiously quiet. Those aboard her could feel rather than see or hear the pirate galley. Occasionally the fog would lift a trifle, teasingly, and that boat would become visible, a smeared mass of steel and wet oars, her bows lined with bearded, wild-eyed men. Then the fog would slip back again.

The silence, truly, was frightful. Even the chief oarsman said never a word, but stood high on the somercastle, in full sight of his men, and instead of calling the stroke swayed back and forth. His whip was at his feet; for even such a tiny sound as the crack of a whip might betray them. But the men would not loaf now, for they knew that their lives depended upon the strength of their arms.

"They're behind us still," the master reported. "We can't lose them. But we'll trick 'em yet. Cling tight to that post, good milord, for when they get too near I'll show them how the fox can turn in its tracks and become a very boar for the nonce."

Guy's lance caught Hugh in the thigh

The pirate galley had reappeared, coming fast, its sharp, painted prow pushing aside the water eagerly, confidently.

The master whispered hurriedly to his mate, who then passed among the oarsmen, whispering.

"They'll catch us, master."

"Mayhap," that worthy said mysteriously, "and mayhap not."

The pirate galley was not much larger than the craft it pursued, but it had eight oars to a side, and Guy counted at least twenty fighting men

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at the rails. The pirates were shouting now, elated, sure of their prey. Some of them swung grappling hooks or wound monstrous horns, while some waved their swords or clashed them against bucklers. That eerie silence was a thing of the past; this part of the fog-shrouded Channel now was like any battlefield for clamor.

Matthew ventured: "A fight on the very doorstep of England . . ."

But Guy shook his head. "A fight? Nay. A brushing aside of vermin that clutter the path. Now if there—" He stopped. He touched Matthew's arm. "Tell me, is that in truth a belted knight I see?"

"It is indeed, milord, else it be a squire who's donned his master's harness."

This man wore a crimson surcoat, very long, without any insignia, and a conical steel helmet with a long nose-piece. He was tall, broad, erect, and looked young. His shield was hung upon his back by means of two leathern thongs which passed around his neck, and he leaned thoughtfully upon a huge two-handed sword.

The master shouted to Guy: "'Tis the Crimson Killer! They do say there's not the man born who can withstand him!"

"A knight of these coasts, eh? I'd heard that sometimes they sent their villains a pirating, but never did I expect to meet one riding his own ship."

Guy grinned; for suddenly he was no longer disgusted, but pleased. Bashing in the skulls of Channel knaves would have been no more than a troublesome necessity; but standing toe to toe with a knight in full armor—whether on the hot sands of Syria or tossed on the dark and chilly waters of the English Channel—that was something different.

He drew his own sword. "Soon, methinks, there'll be—"

Then the master played his trick. Guy, who in his excitement had forgotten the warning to cling to an upright, was thrown flat on the deck and thudded against the low rail. The boat heeled in that direction, and water thundered over the rail, shoving him with it, armor and all, while he scrabbled wildly for a grip.

It was Matthew who yanked him back. Matthew had clung to the upright with one hand, and to his master with the other. Guy staggered to his feet.

"Gramercy, good Matt! Half an inch farther, and what with all the Milan upon my body methinks there'd have been naught but a few bubbles to mark the end of this d'Ambleteuse. But what's about?"

THE movement had been beautifully executed. The galley, going full speed, had spun swiftly to starboard, and her five larboard oars had been docked. Angrily the water slushed and churned; but it was impotent. The Crimson Killer shouted furious commands; he'd been taken by surprise. The pirate craft was caught in a head-on rush, her ram-like prow swished harmlessly past the bow of Guy's boat, and an instant later there was a horrible cracking and splintering of oars and the shrieks of crushed, battered rowers. The pirate galley had been shorn of half her propulsion power.

But Guy's boat had come a hair too close. Three grappling hooks thunked into wet wood. The smaller galley fought to surge behind the larger, to a place where half her own oars could be put back into the water and she could make good her escape from a crippled

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antagonist; but the grappling hooks held, and the pirates tugged at ropes, and slowly the two vessels crunched and squealed together.

"Axes! Axes! Those ropes, ye beef-witted clods!"

Guy raced for the place amidships where the boats rubbed. Already pirates were boarding. The first, a bellowing brute with a studded club, he caught fairly in the neck. The second sprang at him low, cutting upward with a short-sword, but Guy warded the blow on his shield and with the point of his falchion pushed the fellow sideways into the water. The third and fourth pirates stumbled back. They'd not bargained to face a knight.

Guy jumped for the rail.

The rail was about eighteen inches high, and the rail of the pirate's vessel was about a foot above that. Thus these rails formed steps—wet and slippery steps, dangerous for anybody, most dangerous of all for a man in armor.

"Back at them, pigs o' the pen!"

Guy shouted: "Aye! And shall we stick the biggest pig first?"

He had but the briefest glimpse of the Killer's face. Black eyes, a tight black beard, a long and very thin nose, and a thin, long mouth.

His left foot slipped, and the stroke clacked harmlessly off a mail-clad shoulder. Before he could raise his sword for another, the Crimson Killer, with the advantage of a higher position, brought down a terrific blow for the helmet. Guy warded it with his shield, but its force was irresistible, and he tumbled backward to the deck. He tried to get up—and sat down abruptly. He tried again to get up. He reeled against a pile of tackle. Dizzily he was aware that the pirate galley was backing away. No . . . it was his own boat which was backing away. Fuming, he staggered to the stern where the master was calling commands.

"Back to them, craven!"

"Nay, Sir Guy. The combat's ended. 'Twas ended when thine valor checked the rush and my men could cut those ropes. They've only half their oars now, and they'll not catch us."

"But I was in personal combat!"

"And a right worthy combat it would have been, I make no doubt. But thou canst not ask all of us to risk our lives for that. Nay, good Sir Guy, thou hast hired this vessel but 'tis mine still—'tis mine, and I'll have it away from the Crimson Killer and all his men!"

Guy sat down, his head spinning, his heart pounding wildly.

"Mayhap thou'lt meet the Crimson Killer at some other time, good milord," the master murmured sympathetically.

Guy looked up, stared across black water and through the twisting white fog. There was not a sign, now, of the pirate galley.

"Mayhap," he muttered.

Half an hour later, very quietly, they tied up at a quay in Dover.

CHAPTER II.

A NEAT TRAP.

SIR GUY D'AMBLETEUSE was home—but that realization brought him little joy. For six years he had not seen or heard directly from any of his old acquaintances or from his uncle, the Earl of Dartmoor; nor had he expected to hear from or see them.

Indeed, when he'd taken service in the Holy Land it was with the expec-

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tation of remaining forever in that place, dying there, rotting there. For his friends and relations thought him a thief; and he had seen no way in which he could prove that the charge was false. He had not been given an opportunity to fight it out with his accuser, the true thief, his cousin Raoul of Tavistock. He had been denied a trial by combat. And so, bitter and unsmiling at twenty-two, he had gone out of England and traveled to Palestine, where wars with the infidel had helped somewhat to make him forget.

But there was very little strife left in Palestine, where Richard's third Crusade was dwindling, cooling; there was only local bickering now. And the call of England, Guy found, remained unexpectedly strong. So he had come home.

He would not seek out his uncle. Oh, no! Dartmoor had called him a thief, and he'd abide by Dartmoor's decision.

He would ride instead to London, and perhaps there he could attain service in some nobleman's household. For after all, he was twenty-eight, seven years a belted knight, a tanned and grizzled veteran of the Crusaders, perfectly at home in battle as in the lists, and though he had no fortune, no estate, no prospects, he was gently born, and men such as he should not long lack honorable employment.

"Thou hast done well," he told the galley's master. "Here are two extra gold pieces above the price, and some coppers for the men."

"The grace of God be with thee, milord!"

Guy shrugged. The gold coins had been his last, and a few pieces of silver jingled alone in his leather purse, but this did not greatly trouble him. He superintended the unloading and harnessing of his three horses—the huge war horse, Abu, a Turki stallion; his palfrey, a white mare from Damascus; and a brown Flemish bag for Matthew—and he stopped in Dover only long enough, after that, for some meat and a little wine. Matthew, he learned, when he came out of the wine shop, already had a host of acquaintances. The varlet was surrounded by dusty, surly men in brown, monk-like habits.

"These fellows too have been to the Holy Land, milord."

"Indeed?" Guy was not interested.

"They, too, travel the highroad to London Town, and when I told them that the great and gracious Sir Guy d'Ambleteuse was to go that way, they begged that I would intercede for them."

"No alms," Guy snapped.

"Nay, nay, milord! 'Tis not alms they ask, but merely the privilege of riding in your lordship's train."

"For protection, or because thou hast been stuffing 'em with lies?"

"Well, 'tis true," Matthew confessed, "that I told them that all England should properly be here to honor the return of so gracious and highborn and rich a knight as—"

"Rich!"

Guy sniffed, mildly irritated but at the same time amused. He knew the varlet well. They'd been together for six years.

"They may travel with us," he decreed, "but seest thou that none of them get too close to Abu, for I'll have no poking at my harness." He mounted the palfrey. "Myself," he grunted, "I think they are no palmers at all."

GUY rode in advance, glum and silent, his mood well attuned to the weather that day. His body was sore and singing still from the

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Crimson Killer's great blow. He had warded that blow awkwardly, he knew, with the full shield, undercalculating its force. This Killer, surely, was the strongest man ever he'd encountered. It was humiliating to reflect that if the galleys had not been separated, the Killer, and not Guy himself, probably would have been the victor. But this was true. Guy could not but confess to himself that he never could have risen from that blow in time honorably to continue the combat. And Guy was not accustomed to being bettered. He didn't like it.

Behind him Abu walked placidly, eyes downcast, gentle and quiet as any pack animal. Guy's two lances, and his falchion and shield and all his body armor were packed on Abu. Back of the stallion Matthew boasted and boasted. ". . . the greatest of all knights and nobles, I tell thee . . . So rich is my master that no man could walk the length of his lands in four days, or even in five . . . He is the greatest and the richest and the most noble-hearted lord in all the west country. Aye, in all England! For mark ye, palmers, when Sir Guy d'Ambleteuse rides forth to the wars—" The voice rang on and on; and Guy, scarcely hearing it, did not interrupt, for he knew the futility of any attempt to silence Matthew when Matthew had an audience.

There was a roadside shrine, and the palmers hurried forward to kneel in front of it, eager to demonstrate their piety. Guy selected a place apart from and rather in front of the others, and lowered himself to his knees. He prayed a considerable time, asking for strength to renew life here in his own country, for strength to resist all temptation to do any petty or unknightly thing. In his earnestness he had forgotten the others; but the moment he rose to his feet he was aware that something was wrong here.

There were seventeen of the palmers, and they all stood in the road, clustered around Abu and the armor. Guy strode toward them.

"Away from that steed, clods!"

One of the palmers replied with a sneer: "Nay, if d'Ambleteuse be so magnificent a lord truly, mayhap it would interest the baron of these parts to meet with him and speak money matters."

"Mongrels! It will interest me to skewer the gizzards out of every one of ye an there's a single man touches that steed or that—"

He stopped. The false palmers had hitched up their robes, and each of them had drawn a short broadsword.

The sheer impudence of the action astounded Guy. But he realized that he was trapped. Harnessed, he could have scattered these rascals like bits of fluff in a wind, but without his mail and his blade he was almost helpless. He had only his poniard.

"So if the high and mighty Sir Guy d'Ambleteuse will walk with us for a short distance—"

Guy whistled, and suddenly Abu reared. The stallion, docile as any ass a moment earlier, became a fury irresistible. Four men tried to cling to its bit, but it shook them off, and two fell into the ditch, screaming with pain.

But it was of no avail. These robbers could not mount Abu, true, but neither could Guy while it fought them off. And meanwhile, he was at their mercy.

"Fools! I haven't a whole handful of silver!"

"That may be, milord! But doubtless the baron—"

"Who is this baron ye prate of?"

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"Thou'lt meet him, never fear! He is Sir Gregory d'Ewes, lord-master of Malling Keep, which lies just over yon hill. Wilt come peacefully, then, or must we belabor thee?"

Guy glowered, for a time too angry even to speak.

"I'll go," he said at last, "but not one of thee must approach to touch me. I'll go, but with no curs sniffing at my person. Be it else, and I'll fight with that I have." He drew the poniard.

The decision was not a difficult one for the leader.

"So thou dost go, milord, we care not with how stiff a neck."

CHAPTER III.

THE RANSOM PRICE.

SIR GREGORY D'EWES, Baron of Malling and lord-master of Malling Keep, was a large man, but soft, pale, too plump. There was something sticky about him—about his loose, shifty smile, which was rather a smirk, and about his pale blue, very close-set eyes. His nose was large and purple from overmuch wine; and even now, as he sat studying Guy calculatingly, like any mean merchant contemplating a bargain, he turned a beaker of malmsey around and around with his fat, white hands. He wore plum-colored samite, and the silver chaplet of authority, and behind him stood sundry rather shabby looking knights and a smattering of squires and serving varlets.

"Nay, 'tis a deplorable business when a Christian knight tries to rob poor men on the highroad. Thou sayest that they would have been the robbers, not thee, but for witness of thine assault we have two with broken ribs and many bruises. And there is the testimony of seventeen as against that of thyself and thy varlet."

Guy snorted indignantly. "Is not the word of a gently born knight worth more than that of seventeen, or even a hundred and seventeen, base beggars like these?"

"But they are not beggars, but palmers. They are holy men."

"They were armed!"

"For their own protection on the road."

"Why then did they seek my protection?"

"Nay, 'tis their tale that thou thyself, through the medium of thy varlet, suggested that they travel with thee."

Guy, at that moment as often before, would greatly have enjoyed whacking Matthew with a quarterstaff.

"Now heed ye, Malling," he said grimly. "'Tis plain that all this is mere talk, and that thou hast previous agreement with these churls to capture such as I. So that whatsoever I should say in mine own defense, thou'dst find me guilty." He shrugged. "So be it, then. I'll not splutter longer. What's thy penalty, leader of thieves?"

The baron frowned.

"Nay, I like not such words—"

"Should I care what thou likest? Have on! Name the penalty!"

Baron Malling turned the beaker around and around. Once again his eyes were calculating, estimating. Finally he said:

"I am the repository of the high, the middle and the low justice hereabouts, and the punishment for highway robbery is death. But since thou'rt gently born, Sir Guy, I shall fix here an alternative penalty—"

Guy asked: "How much?"

"—of twelve hundred half besants of sycee silver, to be paid here in my

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feudal hall of justice so promptly as convenience permits."

Guy laughed. "I had four such," he said, "but already thy jailors have stolen them. I've naught else in this world."

"Thy varlet told the—"

"My varlet's a gibbering loon and the greatest liar in England!"

Malling frowned, gently impatient.

"Thy varlet," he resumed, "told the complainants that his master is a nephew of Richard Rougemont, Earl of Dartmoor and Baron of Moreton, and methinks I myself have elsewhere heard that Dartmoor had such a relative who went to the holy wars some six years hence, eh?"

ONCE again Guy would have derived pleasure from the sport of pummeling that boastful, irrepressible servant of his.

Malling asked: "Wilt send, then, to Dartmoor for this money?"

Guy shook his head.

"Sooner would I hang," he replied simply.

"Ah! Bad blood between thee, eh? Well, but surely there's some other landed lord in thine own county who'd pay the fine?"

"The ransom?"

"I said the fine!"

Guy paused. He wished to live, naturally, and though he was angry because of the trick that had been played upon him, he was aware that this was no new procedure and that he was not the first knight thus to be snared. Still, the only men of wealth with whom he was acquainted, and who were in England, were his own uncle and Raoul of Tavistock, his cousin.

His uncle, even if Guy should stoop to ask it, would not ransom one he believed to be a thief. And Sir Raoul surely would not send the money, for it was none other than Sir Raoul who in fact had committed the crime for which Guy was blamed. It was Raoul who had stolen from Dartmoor's vaults the bags containing—

Guy said aloud, wonderingly: "Twelve hundred half-besants . . ."

"Aye," said Baron Malling, and leaned forward eagerly, his pale eyes gleaming. "Now surely there's a friend who—"

But Guy was laughing. For this was the very sum! It was precisely twelve hundred half-besants Sir Raoul had stolen!

"Aye, there's a friend . . ."

"Ah! His name, pray, and my clark will indite a message."

Guy still was laughing, quietly, inwardly.

"He is Raoul Cleve, knight, of Tavistock Manor, which is in south Devonshire not many leagues from mine uncle's castle of Moreton."

Now Malling was all eagerness, not noticing the secret amusement of his prisoner. He nodded to a priest, who started to write.

"Hast clarkship? Thou'lt sign it, then. And also thou'lt stamp upon it in wax with the pommel of thy sword, which we will return to thee for that purpose alone." He addressed a tall, squinting, red-haired young squire who stood behind his chair. "Hubert, thou'lt carry this message and fetch me the silver. Take with thee such men-at-arms as thou desirest for protection. One month I'll allot thee, and that should be long enough." To Guy he said: "An the fine be not paid here within one month, defendant, thou'lt suffer the alternative penalty."

To the bustle of preparation Guy paid little heed, less to the threats of the gallows. For he still was chuckling.

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A bitter jest, this, but a sound one. Of course Raoul would not pay! Raoul didn't dare to have his cousin back in Devonshire, for he knew that sooner or later Guy would force him to submit to a trial by combat and thus decide the issue.

Yet by refusing to pay, Raoul would place another crime upon his conscience; and it was this which caused Guy to laugh. Ah, a miserable man, that Raoul Cleve, when he must needs call himself murderer as well as thief and false accuser! A miserable man, with no hope for heaven!

CHAPTER IV.

A BARGAIN.

MATTHEW slipped close to his master at the barrier. Matthew, lodged above the stables these four weeks past, had been doing much prowling and peeking, and had asked many questions, while Guy d'Ambleteuse feigned a haughty confidence that the ransom would yet arrive.

"No key could I get, milord," Matthew whispered, "but I have managed after five nights' work to loosen one of the lower hinges in the door of the east tower. With thine own strength, milord, we can easily pry it open far enough to admit us both. Then we'll climb to the curtain. The one guard there usually sleeps."

"Aye, and then what?"

"I've hid a rope, milord, in the manure pile behind the stables. 'Tis full thirty feet long, and I've knotted it every two feet."

Guy's expression did not change. Apparently listless, bored, while watching a couple of Malling's knights belabor themselves with wooden swords, in fact he was wondering about the palisade on the far side of the tiltyard. Once they were outside the main wall, this palisade alone would stand between them and liberty. It was twelve feet high, and the wooden poles were spiked on top. Still, they were desperate, this pair. Only three days remained, and there had been no sign of the red-haired squire. Baron Malling had instructed the watchman to keep sharp outlook for the squire, one Hubert Vaux, and Malling eagerly awaited the shout which would announce his return. Not so Guy d'Ambleteuse and his varlet. For them the appearance of Vaux, with his inevitable news of frustration, meant a swift jerk to eternity.

"Somehow we'll scale it," Matthew whispered excitedly.

Guy growled: "Talk not so secretively. There's none to hear us here, though there be those who watch."

"Wilt wait for me by the manure pile, then?"

"Thou couldst have chosen a spot less smelly. But I'll be there."

He mounted Abu. The thought of escaping without Abu or the palfrey, without even his mail and falchion, was a painful one, for a mountless and armorless knight is like a fish flapping on dry shore; but there was no other choice. They permitted him Abu in the tiltyard, but no hauberk or ash lance or falchion. Malling even had offered to take him outside for some hawking, if Guy would give his parole; but this Guy had refused to do. So he never quit the castle proper, or one of the inner yards, except when he attended the exercises in the lists.

And there he shone with a brilliant luster. The first afternoon he had fought with brittle lances and wooden swords against several of Malling's

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best champions, and hurled them into the dust with ease. Thereafter none would run a passage with him.

This day he caught the motionless ring four times out of four, and the swinging ring three times out of four; and then he tilted at the quintan, hitting it always at whatever point a squire called, helm, breast, thigh, until the contrivance spun like a madman's top.

He rode back behind the barrier, handed the reins to Matthew, tossed aside the tilting stick, and was about to start for the main gate when Sir Gregory of Malling intercepted him.

"Why, thou art a very wizard, d'Ambleteuse!"

"Nay, thou flatterest."

He had gained no respect for the lord-master of Malling Keep during his four weeks residence there. But indeed, he was not thinking of the baron now, but was eying again that twelve-foot palisade. To try to scale it in the daytime, when the tiltyard was crowded with knights and squires and men-at-arms, would be foolish; but if the watchman atop the donjon and the night porter at the main gatehouse were not too alert of a dark night . . .

"Methinks such skill and strength," Malling continued, all the time smirking, "might even topple Hugh of Folkestone."

Guy asked, though he didn't care: "And who is Hugh of Folkestone?"

"He is a great champion, the greatest in this county. A young man, like thyself, and a rogue, but strong and very fast, and 'tis said that never a knight hath bettered him a-horse or on foot."

"His father must be very proud of him."

"Nay, his father is dead, and his mother too. He lives alone by the sea at Folkestone, with scarce a handful of followers, and those all base-born. But what a lance! And what a swordsman!"

GUY was thinking that much would depend upon the moon. For they dared not wait another twenty-four hours.

He started for the main gate. But the baron took his forearm.

"Nay, but give pause. This is a matter which concerneth thee closely, and thou wisheth it to do so."

"Eh?"

"I have a quarrel with this same Hugh of Folkestone. In a rash moment I had thought to pledge him the hand of my step-daughter, the fair Lady Marguerite."

Guy had seen her frequently, a pale, yellow-haired damsel with large gray eyes. And he had heard that she loved a poor knight of Folkestone.

"So? Thou'lt get a fighter into the family, then, if it be but by marriage, eh?"

"I did but say that I would consider his suit. And later, when I took the welfare of Lady Marguerite into fullest consideration, I decided that she would be in better case as the wife of another neighbor."

"A richer one, I wot?"

"Eh? Well, there's more land, truly. But it was not this of which I was thinking. It was the welfare of my beloved step-daughter. But now this Hugh of Folkestone causes much stir about what he dubs a broken contract, and he hath challenged me to trial by combat, and the Duke hath allowed his claim, and on the very morrow they are to come—"

"Out with it, man! Out with it!"

Malling blurted: "Wilt be my champion?"

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Guy d'Ambleteuse smiled. A bit of real fighting, he was thinking, would not come amiss. But a man must think first of his own neck.

"Nay."

"But if I—"

"What would it profit me, pray, to joust in thy behalf?"

Malling leaned very close and tapped Guy's forearm. Obviously Malling was frightened. Obviously, too, this trial by combat means more to him, in money or lands, than the ransom he hoped still to get from Raoul of Tavistock.

"Ride against this scoundrel, d'Ambleteuse, when he cometh here tomorrow — ride against him with all thy might and skill—and win or lose, and thou survivest, I'll set three free in all thy mail and with all thy weapons. Aye, and when the fine comes from Devon I'll send it back."

"Thou'll swear this?"

"I will swear it."

Guy searched his memory hastily and produced the names of sixteen saints generally considered to be held in greatest veneration in this part of the kingdom. Malling swore by each of them individually; and one of these oaths, Guy thought, might be sufficiently sacred to him to preclude the possibility of mental reservation or repudiation.

"'Tis well," Guy said. "I'll decide in the morning. But first," he added, "I demand that my own mail be restored to me this very afternoon, together with my sword. For remember, pray, I've been four weeks unharnessed, and I require the feel of armor again before I am prepared to joust in all earnest and to the best of my might. I must wear it all day, and I'll sleep in it also."

The request was reasonable, though Malling refused him the sword. "Thy scabbard's weight enough," Malling said.

Matthew walked close to him as they moved toward the gate.

"And what was our jailor asking thee, good milord?"

"To ride to-morrow against some local tilter with whom he's had quarrel. He vowed to set us free, fully equipped, even though I might be tumbled."

Matthew cried: "*Thou* tumbled!" And a moment later: "Thinkest he means to keep this oath?"

"No, I don't."

"Nor do I, good milord. There's trickery somewhere in it."

They walked in silence for a time, and when they parted:

"Then we'll meet by the manure pile just the same, milord?"

"Aye, by the manure pile. At midnight."

CHAPTER V.

OVER THE WALL.

THE craft Malling had taken the precaution to post a sentry in Guy's room this night, remembering that Guy had his mail, and it was well after midnight before this fellow consented to go to sleep. Then Guy tiptoed down a winding stair, along a high, bleak passageway, and into the great hall of Malling Keep. His hauberk and surcoat comfortably encased his body, his helmet was on his head, his camail about his neck; but the scabbard hung empty at his side. However, there were swords in the great hall, and moving very quietly, very carefully, Guy selected one which suited his scabbard. Then he stole out into the bailey yard.

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Matthew was waiting, shivering. He carried the rope.

"'Tis late," he whispered between chattering teeth.

The moon was kind, seldom appearing and then but wanly, half-heartedly. They hugged the shadow of the wall until they came to the east tower. The door was a very heavy one, but old, and Matthew had loosened the bottom hinge so that it was almost free. The masonry around the top hinge was not solid, and Guy set to work on it without hesitation, while the varlet, crouching in the shadows, watched the guard who paced the curtain above.

Now and then Matthew would hiss quietly, and Guy would cease work and flatten himself against the wall until the sentry had passed. Guy's body was wet with sweat, for all the chill of the night, before he was finally able to pry open the bottom of the door sufficiently to permit them both to squeeze through.

They felt for and found the steps which wound upward to the tower. There a faint drizzle of moonlight showed them the door, which was ajar.

But the guardsman responsible here had, it seems, selected this very night to stay awake. The curtain was about two feet wide, the parapet about three feet high, and the guard leaned against this parapet and gazed moodily across the tiltyard toward the barbican gate. He was only a few feet from the tower door; they could almost touch him. He hummed softly to himself, sometimes clicking his tongue against the roof of his mouth.

Guy did not touch his sword. The doorway was not high enough for a good swing; and unless the man were killed or knocked insensible with a single blow, for all his leather and pennyplate, he would shout an alarm. So they waited, shivering, utterly silent, while the man-at-arms hummed his aimless tune again and again, and the heavens began to show a grayish smear of dawn. Soon, alarm or no alarm, the castle would be waking.

The guard straightened, yawned, half turned. Guy d'Ambleteuse drew sword without a sound and retreated a pace, poised to strike. The guard took one step toward the tower. If he had taken a second step it would have been his last. But something seemed to make him change his mind, and he turned completely around and sauntered down the curtain to the south tower, which he entered, closing the door behind him.

Instantly Guy and Matthew were outside, and Matthew was making the loop fast to one of the projections in the parapet.

"If it bears my weight," Guy whispered, "surely 'twill bear thine."

He descended rapidly, for his steel-mittened hands gave no grip, and only the knots saved him from a straight fall. On the ground, he shook the rope, and presently Matthew was with him.

IT was almost full dawn, and at any moment the man atop the donjon would be sounding his horn to rouse the castle.

"There's a smashed barrier in yon corner," Matthew gasped, pointing. "I saw it from above."

They risked a run directly across the tiltyard. They found the smashed barrier, propped part of it against the palisade, braced this with smaller pieces torn from the rest.

"I will try it, milord."

"Nay, I'm the heavier."

The rickety structure swayed beneath Guy's weight, and he held his

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breath as he climbed. On top of the pile he straightened, his chin on a level with the sharpened pole-tops.

A knight, fully harnessed and astride a magnificent war horse, was in front of the barbican gate, not thirty feet away. Behind him were six mounted men-at-arms. The knight thumped the gate with his lance; and even in that dim light of dawn, even before the fellow shouted for entrance, Guy recognized him.

"Ho! Open, varlets, for a Christian knight who comes to give thy master the lie! Ho! 'tis Hugh of Folkestone! Open!"

Guy descended slowly. Already the shouts were awakening the castle, and the watchman was winding his horn.

"Up! Up, milord! The porter at the gate—"

Guy shook his head. He too heard the wicket of the main gate thrown open, heard the portcullis chains clatter and clank in the frosty morning air, heard the scamper of feet in the bailey. But he shook his head.

"Up thyself, Matthew. There's yet time. But I remain."

"Art mad? Hast been seized by—" Matthew stopped, cocking his head. "Who's that without, eh? Methinks the voice is familiar."

"Truly. For we heard it last on the tossing sea."

"The Crimson Killer!"

"None other, good Matthew. I've an unfinished fight with that man, and I'll not run away twice. But thou—there's yet time for thee. Here, I'll give thee a leg up!"

But now Matthew too was shaking his head.

"Nay, I'm no belted one to stand on tickle points of honor, but I know my place and it's at thy back when there's danger."

"Thou wert ever a dolt! Up and off, while yet there's time! This is no quarrel of thine!"

"'Tis milord's quarrel. And no scurvy varlet of Malling Keep shall truss a d'Ambleteuse for this combat. Come—we'll creep past the porter and back, and in the bustle they'll never know. And thou'lt get more sleep this day, milord, for verily thou'lt need it!"

CHAPTER VI.

INTO THE DUST.

THE pageantry of a tournament was missing. There were no banners or pennants, no prancing plumes; knights were not causing their steeds to curvet and rear, peasants did not shout; possibly somewhere in a high turret the Lady Marguerite and her maids watched this scene in hushed silence, but in the tiltyard itself no ladies, or any other women, were visible; heralds did not beat bucklers or wind brazen trumpets, nor did pursuivants shout the virtues of their respective masters. No, it was very solemn. For here was no sport but a serious business, a matter of justice, a wrong to be righted in the final earthly court—the court of arms.

The Duke, though he had sanctioned the contest, was not able to be present in person, but had dispatched to act as his commissioner the gray Earl of Sheppey, who was to be the only marshal.

Hugh and Guy saluted this personage with proper deference, and then they turned in saddle to survey one another.

"So . . ." the pirate-knight said, recognizing him.

"We will finish our dispute on land, eh?"

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Sheppey, the marshal, pronounced the simple rules of combat. Three courses would be run with ash lances, and as much time allowed between them as might be needed superficially to repair or alter harness or weapons, or to change charges: the marshal would be the sole judge of this. If both knights were able and willing to continue the combat after the third course, the rest of the fighting would be with sword and poniard, whether on foot or mounted; but in any event, from this time there would be no pause until the issue had been settled.

"To your places, gentle warriors!"

Guy felt firm and hard, inestimably strong. Smiling, he shook a lance, handed it back, shook another, rested it . . . Matthew fussed around him, tightening this, patting that into place. "At the helm, milord, for he sits high in saddle . . . See! how he sits erect, almost bending back." Abu pawed the ground, not from nervousness but because it felt so happy, so strong. Abu, which seemed to doze most of the time, only truly lived when there was fighting. "So aim high, milord, and this proud—"

The white stick fell.

Guy rode with his point high, seemingly intent upon striking the helm. But at the last instant he shifted, and his lance caught Hugh of Folkestone on the left thigh, lifting Hugh and his steed half off the ground. Hugh's own lance Guy swept harmlessly aside. But the pirate-knight stayed in saddle; and Guy rode back with a perplexed frown; for any other man in the world, Guy believed, would have been unhorsed by that shock.

"Didst not aim high, milord! He sat far back in saddle until the signal, and then he leaned far forward, which surely meaneth—"

"Fool," Guy said coldly. "Canst not understand that this was the very thing he wished me to believe? Thinkst thou a champion so celebrated hath any weakness so plain? He *desired* me to try for the helm, because he thought I might overreach myself and expose my right shoulder."

The next course was uneventful. Both champions made full hits, so that both chargers rose on their haunches, and the noise of the collision might have been heard for miles. But curiously, no injury was done. Guy d'Ambleteuse scarcely was breathing heavily when he rode back to the line and signaled his readiness to continue. The Crimson Killer made a like signal. And again the baton fell.

This time, Guy thought, the man will know that I have perceived his bait for a high point, that I have guessed that he seeks an exposed right shoulder; so this time he'll not expect me to try for the helm.

So Guy tried for the helm.

HE hit it, too, full on the bottom, his lance sliding neatly over the pirate's shield. But his own shield did not shift rapidly enough to avoid a sudden change of attack.

He found himself asprawl in the dust, insanely battering wet leather with a jagged stick. He rolled, spitting, coughing. He sat up. The world rocked, and liquid streamers of red wriggled before his eyes. Apparently he'd gone over Abu's rump, taking the entire saddle with him. He struggled to his knees, to his feet, casting aside the mass of splinters that had been a lance. Wildly he looked around.

Hugh of Folkestone was on his back, struggling to prop himself up by his elbows. Everywhere about the lists the dust was settling languidly.

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Guy jerked forward, fumbling for his sword. The sword had been twisted behind him; but his poniard was in place, and he drew this. Hugh of Folkestone was trying to sit up. Guy fell full-length upon him, ripped the camail from the bottom of the helm; and then the poniard was pressed against that brown, thick, knotted throat.

"Wilt plead?"

The black eyes, not ten inches from his own, showed no hate, but only, at first, dull, dazed astonishment; and then miraculously they cleared, becoming calm. After what seemed years, Hugh of Folkestone tried to speak, failed, and wetted his lips to try again.

"I'll never plead. Take thy forfeit."

But Guy shook his head. "I've no wish to kill thee. Pledge a service to me, not Malling."

"What service?"

"Nay, I know not, now. But 'twill be honorable."

"Then I pledge it to thee, for performance at thy command."

Guy rose, lurched back into Matthew's arms. Jabbering figures were all around him. One was Malling, who jerked pudgy hands in front of Guy's face.

"Kill him! 'Twas to the death! Thou'rt my champion, and I command thee to kill him!"

Guy spat in his face, and then lost consciousness.

CHAPTER VII.

TREACHERY.

IT was twilight, three hours after the combat, when Guy stood at the main gate, dizzy still, but washed and refreshed with wine. The portcullis was up, the tiltyard deserted, and beyond, the barbican gate stood open and unguarded.

Both champions, despite the hour and their own exhaustion, had refused to linger at Malling Keep. Sir Hugh departed almost before the dust had settled, a man dazed and stunned, but still able to sit upright in saddle, his mouth drawn hard, and pain and black hatred in his black eyes. And now Guy was ready to go.

It seemed strange. He had expected the baron to find some excuse for breaking his vow. Possibly, he reasoned, the presence of the Duke's commissioner was the explanation. Yet he was suspicious.

"My mounts," he called. "And Matthew, my varlet."

"They will be brought promptly," Malling purred.

"So thou art a man of some honor after all," Guy mused. "I hadn't thought it."

"Surely, good Sir Guy, thou hadst not thought that I would break my plighted word?"

"Umph," said Guy. His body, under the Milan steel, remained sticky with sweat, but he had refused to permit an unharnessing, for he trusted nobody here. He glanced around. "My mounts and varlet . . ."

"They are on the way. If thou'lt step through here—"

Guy should have been warned by the man's fawning eagerness; but perhaps Guy was too dizzy still, too weary, to be alert. He passed under the portcullis and out into the feeble sunlight of the tiltyard.

"The horses and varlet will be brought to thee," came Malling's voice, *"when the fine hath been paid!"*

Counterpoise chains clacked angrily, then whirred through their grooves.

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Guy spun on his heel, shouting. The portcullis fell with a crash; and behind the portcullis Gregory of Malling laughed.

"Scoundrel! Thou has vowed—"

"I vowed that if thou tilted against Folkestone I'd set thee free in all thy mail and with all thy weapons, but I said naught about thy steeds, Sir Guy, and naught about retainers." The baron shoved two ash lances between the portcullis bars, and they fell at Guy's feet. "Here, then, is the last of thy weapons, and surely thine armor is upon thee. What else, eh? Pleasant journey, good Sir Guy!"

When at last Guy staggered away, and crossed the tiltyard, and passed out into the gathering darkness of the highroad, his face was purple, blood thumped in his temples, his throat was sore from shouting curses, his knuckles raw and bleeding from beating against the bars. He was free — and never in his life had he experienced such wild, impotent rage.

For his yelling and stamping had won him nothing but laughter; until at last the Baron had added the final insult of walking away. Some men-at-arms had remained to taunt the foolish knight. And Guy had stumbled off, weaker and more weary than he had been after the combat with Hugh of Folkestone.

Somewhere in a casement, he knew, the Baron was watching, and drinking wine, and laughing. Ah, he was craft, that man! No doubt he had long suspected that his prisoner would be worthless for ransom purposes, and had read through Guy's elaborate air of confidence. He had used Guy to pay off an old score, to cheat a neighbor, to gain land by marriage in violation of a contract. He had been cleared by the final earthly court—and now he was casting off the instrument of clearance.

Now he was rid of a knight who could only be troublesome. And without breaking the letter of his vow, he was additionally the gainer by three horses, one of them virtually priceless, and a skilled body servant who could be beaten and tortured into his own service. Aye, crafty! So he sat back in his castle, like a poisonous spider in its web, and drank wine and laughed while he watched the dupe depart.

And Guy? He didn't know where he was going, and didn't care. He had his armor, his sword and dagger, and two heavy, twelve-foot lances — awkward weapons, utterly useless to a man on foot. But he had no money, and he had no mount. Encased in steel, dragging one weary foot in front of the other, he made a ridiculous figure. And he knew it. But what else could he do? Further shoutings in front of Malling Keep would only make him appear more ridiculous. One man cannot take any castle, and Malling Keep was exceptionally strong: a hundred men, with siege machines, would require weeks, maybe months, to storm that place with any prospect of success.

He went in the direction he had seen the Crimson Killer go. For the Killer owed him a service, and this was his one hope. Sir Hugh might be a pirate, but Guy believed that his vow would be steel. The black eyes had said that.

Not for an instant did Guy consider deserting his varlet and his horses. A man might be soever rich, yet search a lifetime for a horse like Abu. And as for Matthew — well, Matt was base-born, and Matt was impudent and in some respects maladroit; but nevertheless he was Matt. The south Devonshire man had quit his home six years

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before to follow a disgraced d'Ambleteuse to the Holy Land, and not once but many times since he had saved his master's life. He was a babbling, boasting fool, and a great nuisance; but he was Matt.

Darkness now was complete, and Guy walked with his head down, partly from weariness, partly in order to be sure that he remained on the little road and did not wander afield. It was out of a corner of his left eye that he saw the far flicker of torchlight in the woods.

ONE of the men-at-arms was a very dolt.

"I see not yet," he mumbled, shoveling earth over the moneybags, "why we shouldn't make off for London Town instanter."

Hubert Vaux smiled at the other man-at-arms, one Simon.

"Because," Hubert explained, "if we do not return within the next day or two, our lord of Malling would have out an alarm, and we'd be caught ere we had time to reach the Low Countries."

Simon grinned to himself. Hubert, too, grinned.

"Will he not suspect us anyway, returning empty-handed?"

Hubert remained patient, as with a backward child.

"Thou canst not read these messages," he said, drawing two letters from his pocketbook, "but surely thou canst understand the good Saxon tongue when I speak it, eh? Well, then, this epistle"—he waggled the smaller one—"was writ by Sir Raoul of Tavistock, the man we were sent to see, and in it Raoul refused to pay any ransom or fine for the release of his cousin, Guy d'Ambleteuse. But thou'lt remember that while we lingered at Tavistock the night, that manor was attacked by Dartmoor's men, eh?"

"Aye. There'd been some manner of feud between 'em, they told me in the barracks, for that Dartmoor swore Tavistock was a thief."

"True. And the siege lasted a week, though you nor I nor Simon here was obliged to participate, is it not so? Aye? Now Dartmoor prevailed, and Tavistock was slain, but before Tavistock died he confessed sundry sins to Dartmoor, and one of these was the theft of some half-besants for which Dartmoor's nephew, who is milord's prisoner, was falsely blamed.

"Now, when he heard this, the earl was distrait; and when he learned from me that we were in the manor for the purpose of collecting a fine owed Malling upon the person of d'Ambleteuse, he was filled with remorse and counted out this money instanter and gave me this message to deliver to his nephew." Hubert waggled the larger letter. "In it he implores his nephew's forgiveness, and makes him his heir again, and begs him to return."

Simon rose, pretending to stretch himself after the labor of burying the moneybags. He glanced at Hubert, and Hubert nodded. Simon strolled around behind the other man-at-arms, who was kneeling.

"There's no need that Malling or d'Ambleteuse ever should learn about this second message, understand? We will say naught of it, and naught about the money, delivering only Tavistock's message of refusal—which I was shrewd enough to retain. Then soon our lord of Malling will be employing me for another errand, and I will elect to take you and Simon with me, and the three of us will come out here, dig up this silver, and depart at our leisure, eh?"

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The man-at-arms blinked in delight.

"We will live like lords . . ."

"Aye," Hubert coaxed, "we will live like lords." He glanced at Simon, whose sword was drawn. Simon's sword went up, and he balanced on the balls of his feet. "We will live like kings, forsooth, and—"

The blow fell. The man-at-arms toppled forward without a sound. Hubert leaned over him.

"Methinks he's not quite dead, Simon."

Simon kicked a shoulder, turned the fellow over on his back, and with no more compunction than a man who steps on an ant, ran him through again and again.

"He's dead now," Simon grunted.

"Aye, he's dead now. Grab thou his feet, good Simon, and I'll take the arms, and we'll drag him into yon bushes."

"And remember," Simon said, "he was killed by mistake in the bickering at Tavistock Manor."

Simon then leaned over to take the dead man's ankles. It was Simon's greatest mistake. Never should he have trusted Hubert Vaux.

Hubert did not risk the scraping of sword in scabbard, but whipped out his poniard. Simon emitted one startled gurgle, rolled, tried to kick—and then was still. And Hubert Vaux wiped his poniard on some oak leaves.

"The treasure's greater," Hubert said aloud, "for one man only."

"Nay, but first be sure 'tis the right man!"

Hubert wheeled, gasping. From out of the bushes in the direction of the Folkestone road, Guy d'Ambleteuse came walking slowly, lumbrously.

The squire ran. But he did not reach even the safety of the nearest tree. The end of a twelve-foot lance hit his left foot. He spun twice around, screaming, and fell. And ponderously Guy sat upon him.

"Eh? Hast letters," Guy muttered, and picked them from the ground. "I'll read 'em. Nay, wriggle not, an thou valuest thy throat."

Then Guy read the letters.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE REVENGE.

IT was almost midnight, and they had some difficulty awakening Hugh of Folkestone, whose bruised body ached and throbbed even in sleep.

"Is he alone?"

"Nay, there's with him a red-haired fellow who attends Malling, but he's bound with saddlestraps and white as a Calais fog."

"I owe Sir Guy a service," Hugh said, rising, "and I think he's no man to be dabbling in treachery. Admit him to the hall, stir up the fire, and fetch us wine."

So presently they sat talking amicably, these two who twice had tried to kill one another. Guy did most of the talking; and Hugh, as he listened, gradually began to grin appreciatively, and to nod, black eyes sparkling with joy and excitement.

From time to time, too, the third man spoke. This was Hubert, bound hand and foot in a chair. "I'll not do it," he would cry. Then Guy would go to him, and place a naked blade against his throat, and coo: "Art certain? Art sure of that?" And Hugh of Folkestone would mutter something about instruments in the cellar which always were more effective than mere daggers because they were used in so much more leisurely a fashion. And finally Hubert Vaux would consent.

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At the end of the conference Hugh slapped his knees.

"This very night, think you?"

"And why not? 'Tis scarce half an hour's ride to Malling."

"Art sure the porter there will open?"

"Be certain that the baron hath given orders that Hubert shall be admitted at any hour—provided he hath the ransom with him. And the porter will know Hubert, surely. And Hubert"—he smiled in the direction of the squire—"will speak as we direct him, eh?"

Hugh of Folkestone rose, chuckling.

"Why, this is no service," he cried. "This will be a great pleasure! I'll serve two ends in a single fight—settle my score with Malling and win for myself my rightful bride." He became serious. "For she's mine, understand, d'Ambleteuse? She's mine in true love, is the Lady Marguerite."

Guy rose.

"Come. There's not too much time."

THE night porter, alarmed and careful, took three guardsmen with him when he crossed the tiltyard to the barbican gate. This was no hour to be trumpeting for entrance, and ordinarily he would have ignored the demand; but he thought he had recognized the voice, and his orders concerning Hubert Vaux were explicit.

He glanced back, assuring himself that his precautions were sound. The portcullis was up, necessarily, but five guardsmen stood there. Sentries leaned over the parapet at several places along the curtain between the east and south towers. And high in the donjon the watchman was attentive.

The porter opened the wicket.

"Who blows at this— Ah, Squire Hubert!"

"'Tis I indeed," Hubert growled, and his voice was curiously strained. "Open up, fool, for I bear the treasure from Tavistock."

"And is that Simon and Fat Hal with thee, eh?" The porter squinted at the two tall dark figures who sat in saddle close behind the squire. They were wrapped in heavy cloaks, which was natural enough, for the night air was chilly.

"Who else? Open up!"

Still the porter was not to be hurried. He leaned far out of the wicket and looked right and left along the palisade.

No one else was in sight. In front, the ground stretched level and bare, without any possible place of concealment, for a full two hundred yards.

One of the cloaked figures whispered something to Hubert, and Hubert cried again: "Open, fool! Wouldst have us spend the night out here, with all this treasure?" He shook one of the bags which hung from his saddle, and half a dozen silver coins fell out, shimmering in the pale moonlight. "Milord would have thee racked if—"

The porter's eyes grew very big.

"Aye! Aye! It shall be opened! Milord had scarce expected—"

The three figures rode in, the two in cloaks keeping very close to Hubert Vaux so that the porter and the men-at-arms did not observe that though Hubert's moneybags were filled his scabbard hung empty.

The barbican gate was locked, and the little group crossed the tiltyard to the portcullis. It was here that the two men behind Squire Hubert threw off their cloaks.

"Saint Ann! Saint Ann with me!"

"A d'Ambleteuse! Saint George for England!"

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Three of the guardsmen fell before they knew what was happening. Two others ran for the inner gate, intending to close it; and these men Guy chased. Guy shouted over his shoulder to Hugh of Folkestone, who snatched Hubert's horn and rode back across the tiltyard, blowing lustily. From the donjon tower came the wild winding of another horn.

Hugh threw open the barbican gate again, and his men came racing across the plain and into the tiltyard. Bellowing, he led them under the portcullis to the relief of Guy, who held the inner gate, cutting, shouting, laughing wildly.

"The donjon! Before they reach it!"

He and Hugh spurred across the bailey, fighting every inch of the way, for by now the whole castle was alarmed and men-at-arms came tumbling out of every door.

They saw Gregory d'Ewes of Malling, a bright steel helmet on his head, a sword belt grotesquely enwrapping his fat form which was covered only by a nightshirt. He was hurrying for the protection of the donjon keep, that inestimably strong last line of defense where a handful of men could hold off an army.

A PIKE ripped Guy's surcoat, hooked into his swordbelt. He leaned back, trying to tug it loose. Then a saddle strap broke.

For a moment the world seemed all feet and legs. But he rose, his knife in his left hand, his sword in his right. Above him, rising and falling with the blows, Hugh of Folkestone was clearing a space.

"The donjon!" Guy shouted again.

There was a long wooden gangplank which led to a tiny door fifteen feet above the pavement. Malling had reached it, with four or five of his men, and they were kicking the planking loose at the top.

Gasping, Guy raced up the planking. It shuddered, and fell. But he'd reached the doorway, sprawling on his knees and elbows. Blows rained upon him, but he scarcely felt them; they were like the taps of a willow wand. He got up, swinging his sword. Everybody here was an enemy, and there was no need for discretion.

He saw the Baron, a white, ghostlike figure in his nightshirt, race for the steps which led to the tower-top. Then somebody slammed shut the door and everything was black.

Guy struck right and left at darkness, while he walked slowly, lumbrously, like a man wading through water, toward the place where he'd last seen the Baron.

Something hit him in the back of the neck, and he pitched forward, running in order to keep his balance. He swung his blade again. It struck a wall, and sparks flew.

He fell, and somebody fell on top of him. The sword was wrenched from his hand. His poniard scraped again and again upon the pavement, producing more sparks—and then it found something soft, and he was free.

Now there was, abruptly, a horrible silence. He could not see anything at all, and he could hear only a faint, muffled panting. He did not know how many men were about him. Two or three, at least.

The knife in his right fist, he crept along a wall until his feet encountered a step. He started up. At the fourth step his outstretched left hand touched leather. There was a startled grunt, and Guy sprang aside, stabbing by guesswork. The dagger scraped off

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something that felt like mail. Guy started to run up the steps.

The bumping of his left shoulder told him the course, around and around, and always up. There was a possibility that Sir Gregory had cast below some section of wooden steps, put there for this very purpose, so that at any instant Guy might leap into nothingness and be dashed to death at the bottom of the donjon. This was a chance he was forced to take. He went up, and up.

He slammed against a door. It was open an inch or more, and a drizzle of moonlight was visible through this aperture. Somebody on the other side was trying to fasten a chain across it. Guy threw himself against the door and it crashed open.

"Ah . . ."

Arms akimbo, he looked around, smiling. The donjon tower at Malling Keep was round, about twenty feet across, and sixty feet tall, so that the sounds of the fighting came faintly here. Besides, the old, damp stones appeared to have an absorbent quality, discouraging noise, drinking it with haste. A parapet about three feet high, and not very solid, rimmed the tower-top, which was bare except for the flagpole and the two other men who shared it with Guy d'Ambleteuse.

The watchman, unarmed, crouched low against the parapet, staring at Guy with enormous, frightened eyes.

Sir Gregory d'Ewes, Baron of Malling and lord-master of Malling Keep, in his nightshirt, held a long sword. Guy had neither sword nor shield, but only his poniard. It was the Baron who had said "Ah . . ." Smiling fondly, softly, his first fright gone once he perceived Guy's condition, he lifted his blade to his left shoulder and started across the flagstones.

"I brought my own ransom," Guy said.

The Baron continued to smile. He struck. Guy jumped back, and the blow was short.

The Baron struck again. Again Guy jumped back.

"There's much time," the Baron said affably. "Now or a little later—I care not."

Once again he swung the sword, and this time Guy bent low and leapt forward instead of backward. The blow caught him on the right shoulder, but he'd stooped to it. Still, though the bone wasn't broken, he knew as he sprang in that the feeling was going from his right arm. He shifted his poniard to his left hand, and got his left elbow against the Baron's sword arm as the Baron tried to raise the weapon for another blow. He pushed, hard.

The Baron stumbled backward, struck the parapet. A stone came loose, and the Baron teetered. His eyes opened very wide. He tried to shriek, but couldn't.

The donjon tower at Malling Keep was sixty feet tall. Guy d'Ambleteuse stood where the stone had been pushed from its place, and he stared thoughtfully down into the bailey yard. Even from here it was plain that Sir Hugh's men had clinched their victory and that the entire castle was in their hands. Sir Hugh himself stood near the main entrance of the palais, a thin white figure clasped in his arms. The Lady Marguerite had her lover now. And directly below, as Guy could see by leaning far out, men were gathering around what remained of the Lady Marguerite's step-father.

Guy turned to the scared watchman.

"Thou'lt show me first to the dungeons, for I'd get my varlet out of du-

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rance. After that thou'lt show me to the stables. Come."

GUY read his uncle's letter once again before he quit Malling Keep, and he smiled to read it. For it meant honorable service, eventually a great estate, and immediately the comfort of a home and the sight after six years of the pleasant lanes and hedgerows of Devonshire.

He mounted the palfrey. Abu was loaded and ready—loaded not only with armor, but also with silver half-besants which would be returned to Moreton Castle. Somewhere behind him Hugh of Folkestone was in wrapt conversation with his bride, happy in the realization that he would no longer be obliged to scour the Channel as the Crimson Killer in order to maintain his estate, since the Lady Marguerite was inheriting Malling Keep. And Matthew, garrulous Matt, was haranguing a group of men-at-arms.

"I tell thee that milord Sir Guy is the greatest and the richest nobleman who ever came out of the west country. Why, he hath estates so broad that not a one of you—"

Guy called him.

"Ho! thou slovenly craven! Cease thy babbling and attend me! For we're away, now."

Matthew hurried forward, all smiles.

"For Devonshire, good milord?"

"For Devonshire," said Guy.

THE END

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Hidden Opium

POLICE of New York City are always on the lookout for opium, but although many places are suspected of selling the drug, the difficulty is to find evidence. When a raid is in progress, every inch of the premises has to be searched—window trim, door bars, garbage pails, and even the salt cellars. Recently a Chinese store was suspected of selling opium. Several times the police raided Sam's place, but found nothing. On the last visit they saw a ferret disappear through a crack in the floor. Pulling up some boards they caught the animal—a sort of thin weasel, which usually lives on rats—and found a bag of opium hung on a collar around his neck. Sam had patiently trained him to keep the opium out of sight.

—*Delos White*

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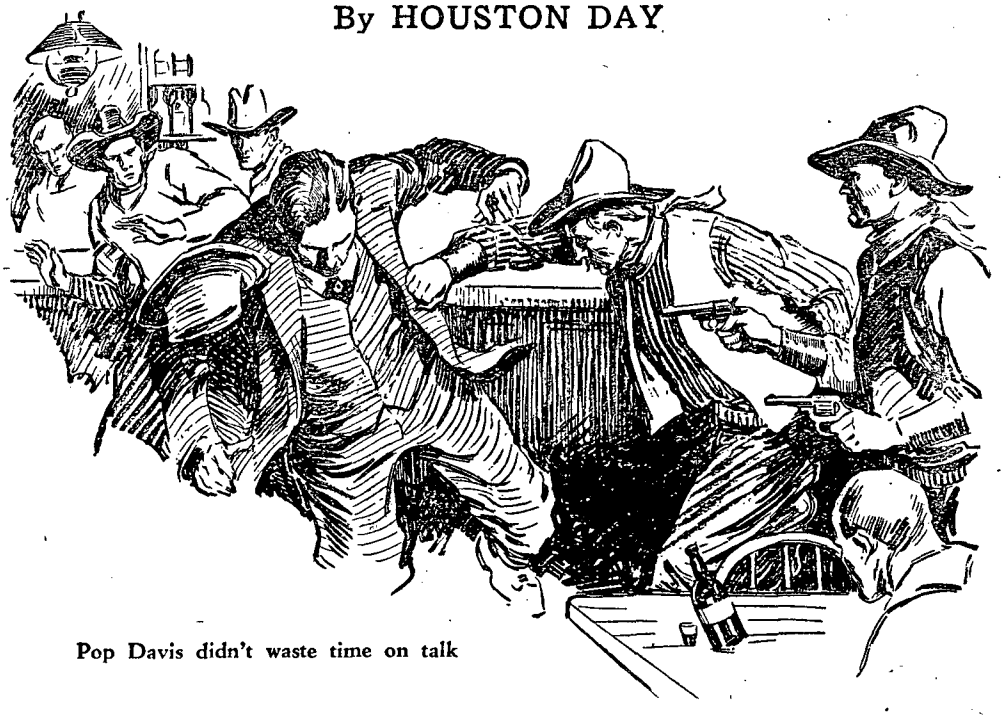
Pardners

By HOUSTON DAY



Pop Davis didn't waste time on talk

"I ain't suspicious," said the Bar C cowman, "but when a crook begins braggin' about his honesty—"

I'M wearin' a grin as wide as the Rio Grande in flood season when I come out of Peter Whetstone's office.

"Times is hard, Joe, and money's scarce," he's told me. "I don't want to foreclose on that poor farm you miscall a ranch. Nobody is buyin' land these days, and I would just have more taxes to worry about. So if you and Pop Davis pay me a thousand dollars, I'll wipe off that three hundred dollars interest and tear up the mortgage."

Yes, sir, I was smilin' so hard my ears hurt, I was that tickled. For ten years, Pop and I had been tryin' to pay off that mortgage, but something always happened. Once we landed in town and found we had just a hundred dollars more'n we needed. We was so happy we dropped in at Jake Carstairs' to celebrate just a little, and two weeks later we had to borrow hosses to carry us and our mortgage back to the ranch.—It was some c e l e b r a t i o n, though!

But this time, there wasn't goin' to be no slip-up. Nary a one. So I heads for the bank to meet Pop and get the cash for Mr. Whetstone. He's not around when I arrives, so I inquires politely at the cage, and they informs me my pardner has got the money and gone out.

I begin then to get a little bit uneasy. Perhaps some one has seen Pop's bankroll and tapped him on the head. My smile fades, because outside of the

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Bar C, and Horace, my hoss, I ain't got nobody but Pop, the cantankerous little runt.

The first place I heads for is Jake Carstairs's saloon, but when I get there I see no sign of Pop at the bar. I look around the room, and I see the stud and faro tables are deserted. But down in the corner Carstairs is spinnin' some kind of a wheel, and standin' in front of it is Pop.

I crossed the floor in a hurry, and arrives just in time to see a little white ball click into a slot marked "00." Carstairs grins and says:

"Tough luck, Mr. Davis. The house wins all bets."

And with that he sweeps the money off the table.

I am waitin' for Pop to place his next bet, when I see he has no more chips or money in front of him. My mouth gets as dry as a lizard's tail. My heart takes a dive, hits the bottom of my stummick, turns a couple of flip-flops, then bounces up and hits my back teeth.

Pop turns around and looks at me kinda sad-like.

"Yes, Joseph," he says. "Go ahead and say it. I'm the biggest jackass in the whole county."

By this time I begin to suspect the worst has happened. Our mortgage money is gone again.

"In the county, only?" I asks, sorta cold-like.

"Texas is a pretty big State," Pop mutters defensively.

"Yeah, it is," I says. "But if it was twice as big, and had twice as many jackasses, you would still be the biggest by five hands."

At that, Pop looked hurt, and I begin to feel sorry for him. He was right. Texas is a big State, and perhaps I'd taken in too much territory. Besides, I remembered the time I tried to buck Carstairs's faro bank with the mortgage money in my jeans.

"Okay, pardner," I says. "I back yore play, but when old man Whetstone hears what you done he's liable to be a bit provoked."

But even though I slaps Pop on the back and tells him to cheer up, I'm feelin' kinda low as I crosses the street to tell Mr. Whetstone he has to extend our mortgage for another year.

I WALKS into his office and speaks my piece, but I'm very much disappointed in the way he receives my request. He was not half as agreeable as he had been when I told him Pop and I had a thousand dollars in the bank. In fact, he becomes what you might almost call insultin'. He rears up on his hind laigs and shakes a finger in my face.

"You are both a couple of irresponsible scalawags," he shouts. "You are not entitled to any more consideration from me. Either you bring a thousand dollars into this office by the fifteenth or I will foreclose on the Bar C and sell it to the highest bidder, even if I don't get more'n fifteen cents for it!"

"But Pop never seen one of those roulette wheels before," I argues. "He ain't to blame. Any puncher is liable to be thrown by a strange hoss."

"Bah!" snorts Mr. Whetstone. "Bah! You are both a couple of half-wits.—No, I take that back. There ain't a good brain between you. Every one in town knows that wheel is wired."

"I don't savvy," I says. "What do you mean wired?"

"Crooked, you jackass!" he shouts. "Crooked! Do you think Jake Carstairs is takin' any chances on losin' money to a couple of ignorant cow

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wrestlers like you two? No, not for a minute. Why, it makes my blood boil! You take my money—money you owe me—and stuff it right in his pocket. Get out of here before I do something violent!"

Mr. Whetstone is actin' like he was aggravated, so I guessed it was time to mosey along.

"What did he say?" Pop asks me when I come out.

"He says we are both very dumb."

"Huh, you already told me that."

"Yeah, but he proved it. You tossed our money into a crooked game."

Pop's eyes squinted, and his mustache bristled.

"You mean to tell me that wheel game weren't on the level?"

"You guessed it."

Pop hitches up his belt and fingers the butt of his Colt.

"I'm goin' back there," he says.

"No you ain't," I tells him. "'Cause if you do you'll be just foolish enough to plug him."

"Plug him?—Huh, you'll be able to use his head for a sieve!" says Pop.

And already he's walkin' toward Carstairs's joint.

I grabs him by the arm.

"Nothin' doin'!" I argues. "You'll only get yourself strung up, and I ain't goin' to work the Bar C alone and pay off that mortgage all by myself."

"You won't have to," says Pop. "Didn't Whetstone say he was goin' to foreclose?"

"Yes," I agrees. "But anyway, that guy Carstairs ain't worth shootin'. If you want to work him over with yore fists I'll back yore play. But give me that gun first."

Pop is an argumentative little cuss when he gets started. There is nothing that will satisfy him but to shoot it out with Carstairs. But I'm very determined myself; and finally, still grumblin' and arguin', Pop hands over his six-gun. And together we ambles down to Carstairs's place and walks in.

AS we get inside the door we see Carstairs is standin' by the bar, a toothy grin on his face that outshines the big diamond stickpin in his tie. He is buyin' drinks for the house. With him I spots Dopey Dan Dorsey, One-Eyed Sullivan and Hoss-Ears Jenkins. They is all laughin', too, and I suspects that they know about the wheel and are laughin' at us.

It makes me sore, so I don't wait to make a speech before I throw down on the room with two guns.

"Just stand where you are, gentlemen," I says, "an' keep yore hands on the bar. Mr. Davis desires to have a little confab with the proprietor."

I'll say one thing for Pop Davis. He don't waste no time on talk right then. Carstairs is about six feet and he weighs two hundred and twenty pounds. Pop tips the scales at a hundred and fifteen in his chaps, and he's about five feet four in his Dodge City boots. But size don't make any difference to Pop. He raises himself on his toes and smacks Carstairs right in the eye. Then he swings his left at Jake's other eye.

"Good boy, Pop!" I shouts. "Nice punchin'. Let him have one on the nose for me."

Pop did, and I'm enjoyin' the scene very much, especially when Pop butts Carstairs in the stummick and knocks him off'n his feet, and then dives right on top of him. I am right in the middle of a big laugh at hearin' Carstairs holler quits when somehow or other I find that I'm sprawled out on the floor, and I don't know how I got there.

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The guns have been knocked from my hands, and I feel a very bad pain in the back of my head. Something tells me I've been hit, so I raise myself on my elbow and looking up I see John Tilliman, the sheriff, standin' over me. I'm right. I have been hit.

The sheriff is coverin' Pop, but he doesn't do anything about it when Carstairs and his three cronies jump on my pardner at the same time. Carstairs grabs Pop around the middle, and Dopey Dan, One-Eyed Sullivan and Hoss-Ears Jenkins begin to take turns sockin' him.

That makes me sore. I've seen the time when Pop could handle three or four townies; but he is older now, and so I decides to give him a little help. I jump to my feet and dives into the fight.

The sheriff lets out a bellow, "Stop or I'll shoot!"

I don't stop, and I hear a bullet buzz by my ear. Before he c'n fire again, I've landed right in the middle of the fracas, and I start swingin' with both fists.

But maybe those fellows were a mite tougher than they looked. Or maybe I'm gettin' a bit older myself, for anyway, Hoss-Ears Jenkins turns around.

"So you want some, too?" he says, and with that he swings.

His fist lands on the side of my jaw, and once more I find myself on the floor, without being able to savvy just how I got there. I jump up again, and this time Dopey Dan stops pummelling Pop long enough to take care of me.

"Oh," he says, "so you ain't got enough, eh?"

He clouts me between the eyes, and I find I'm not able to get up so quick; and while I'm tryin' I feel myself being picked off the floor, and a second later I'm flyin' out the door.

I land right on my face in the dust, and sit up spluttering. Before I can find out what became of my laigs, the swingin' doors part again, and out comes Pop. He is flyin' too, and he lands right on top of me.

THE sheriff strolls out and unloads our guns, then tosses them to us.

"You two old rascals ought to be ashamed of yoreselves for creatin' a disturbance in Mr. Carstairs's establishment," he says.

I looks at him, and spits out a mouthful of dust.

"Huh! An' Pop and I voted for you, too."

Tilliman laughs.

"Thanks for that, boys, but get movin' now.—And get movin' fast, 'cause if yore in town by nightfall I'll have to throw you in the calaboose."

Pop Davis and I ain't feelin' so good. In fact we're very much bruised up, so we takes the sheriff's hint and decides maybe we'd better go back to the ranch.

That night, after we painted each other with arnica, Pop and I are sittin' out in front of the ranch house, havin' a smoke before we turn in. We ain't talkin' much, 'cause Pop suspects I'm a little sore at him for losin' the mortgage money. And he's right. We've been sittin' there for about an hour, waitin' for the other to loosen up and say somethin' when Pop begins to cuss.

"What's itchin' you now?" I asks.

"Nothin'," says he. "But there's somethin' stickin' me."

So he stands up and peels off his shirt and starts lookin' through it. Then he cusses again.

"I'll be a cross-eyed horned toad," he exclaims. "Look at this."

I look and see that he is holdin' Carstairs's stick pin.

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"How'd you get that?" I asks. "I didn't know you was a pickpocket."

"I didn't pick his pocket. He was wearin' this dinkus in his tie."

"And you lifted it out while you was battlin' him, eh?"

"No, I'm not a lifter, either. It musta come out while we was rollin' on the floor, and then got stuck in my shirt.—Huh! Imagine a full grown man wearin' glass like this in his tie."

"There's no accountin' for tastes," I replies. "Some guys think they c'n beat a crooked roulette wheel, too."

Pop didn't say nothin' to that, but he starts to toss the pin away.

"Hey!" I exclaims. "I want that stick pin. It's worth a thousand dollars."

"One thousand bucks?" says Pop. "An' who'd you say was the biggest jackass in Texas?"

"Yo're just plain dumb," says I. "It's all you got to show for our mortgage money, ain't it?"

Pop has no answer to that, so he hands over the pin and I uses it to close a rip in my shirt that I got when I sailed through the swingin' doors at Carstairs's.

We don't say much more, and pretty soon it's time to go to bed, which I'm glad of on account of my body being as sore as a branded calf's.

THE next day Pop and I don't feel like workin'. What's the use of keepin' the ranch up when it ain't goin' to belong to us any more. But it gets kinda monotonous for me to just sit and smoke and look at Pop's homely face, so soon I'm back in the old rut, doin' the chores. Pop joins in, and the next few days drag by till it's time to go to town and tell Mr. Whetstone it is the fifteenth and he's a ranch owner.

From force of habit we head for Carstairs's, when we get there, and we find there's a celebration goin' on. Dopey Dan, Hoss-Ears and One-Eyed Sullivan are hangin' over the bar with a lot of other loafers, so I knows somebody is buyin' drinks.

Pop and me ain't got any money, so we wastes no time in sidling up to the bar and lookin' thirsty. Sure enough, the bartender slides a bottle down in front of us and tells us to drink up.

Sheriff Tilliman drifts in, and he hands us a smile to show that bygones is bygones.

"Go easy on the red-eye, boys," he says. "I don't want you two cleanin' up this place again."

Everybody laughs exceptin' Pop and me; we're feelin' very downhearted. So we have three fast drinks before we begin to wonder what all the shoutin' is about. We don't have to ask, though, because Carstairs speaks up. He comes over and slaps me on the back.

"No hard feelin', boys?"

"No more'n I have for a rattlesnake," says I.

"An' you c'n lay that double," says Pop.

Carstairs laughs. "Forget it, boys! You gambled and lost. I s'pose you come to town to look for jobs?"

"Yeah," I replies. "Know anybody that c'n use a couple of top hands?"

"No, but I c'n use a couple of men. I'm openin' up a dance hall, next door, in a few days. I'll need a couple of good steady men to keep things tidy."

Pop looked interested.

"You mean you want us to take care of the disorderly element?" he asks, throwin' a nasty look at Dopey Dan.

"No," says Carstairs. "I got three good bouncers. But some one'll have to sweep the floor and keep it waxed, and I thought you boys'd like the job."

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I turn quick to grab Pop, 'cause I don't want him to start another row by sockin' Carstairs. But I'm surprised to see him starin' downcast-like at the bar. Then I begin to understand. He hasn't said much about us losin' the Bar C, and I was beginnin' to think he didn't care. But from one look at his face I know different now. It looks as if he's lost his fightin' spirit, as well as the place.

To make conversation, an' because I feel the need of another drink right sudden, I says:

"How come all this prosperity, Carstairs? I kinda thought the free drinks you give those guys that fight yore battles for you would eat up all the profits."

Carstairs grins.

"Yeah, this place isn't the money maker it used to be. But I'm comin' into some big money to-day—five thousand dollars."

I whistles softly. That is big money. "You musta gone into partnership with some bank bandits," says I.

"Nothin' like that," says Carstairs, lookin' insulted. "I always play the game on the level."

I HEAR a derisive snort from Pop, an' kick him on the shin.

"Remember that diamond stick pin I wore?" Carstairs goes on. "Well, I lost it. It was insured for five thousand, although that's only half what it cost me. Well, Peter Whetstone has promised to deliver the check here this mornin'."

I whistle again, and begin to feel sick inside. Especially under my left ribs, where this same stick pin has begin to rub a hole in my skin.

"You mean that was a real diamond?" I stammers, when I c'n get my breath.

Carstairs swells up indignantly. "Certainly," he snaps. "Do you think I'd wear an imitation?"

"I dunno," says I. "Would you?"

Carstairs snorts. "There were some ugly rumors circulated in this town when they heard I was goin' to collect my insurance," he says. "But I sure silenced them in a hurry."

"Who'd you shoot?" asks Pop.

"I didn't shoot anybody. I'm not a dumb cowboy. I just offered a thousand dollars reward, and no questions asked, for the return of the pin. And that sure scotched the ugly rumors."

"One thousand dollars—?" stammers Pop.

"You mean you'll give that to get yore pin back?" I asks, tryin' to keep the excitement out of my voice.

I'm hangin' on to the bar. My head is goin' round and round. I look at Pop, and sees that he is just as excited as I am at the prospects of gettin' our ranch back. He looks as if some one had hit him over the head with a brandin' iron. His eyes are glassy and his jaw is hangin' open. But Carstairs's next words cooled us off in a hurry.

"No," he says. "There ain't no use of offerin' the reward now. I'll be collectin' the insurance in a half-hour."

My heart, which had been gettin' in the way of my tongue, took a dive and hit the bottom of my stummick so hard I thought it was goin' clean through. Disappointed? There ain't no word to tell how I felt.

"If there's anythin' I hate," Carstairs goes on, "it's a four-flusher. There have been lots of times when I've been tempted to pawn that pin. But I always resisted. It had become as much a part of me as my mustache. Once Dopey Dan suggested that I sell the diamond and have an imitation put in its place. No one would know the dif-

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ference, he argued.—But not for me. When I wear a stickpin it's the real stuff. That's why they call me Honest Jake."

I'd never heard any one call him honest Jake, but I let that pass, and finished the drink in front of me. I hate to be disappointed. It certainly spoils the taste of everything—even a drink.

Pop nudges me in the side.

"I wanna speak to you alone."

I excuse myself to Carstairs, and follow Pop up in front by the window.

"Ain't it terrible!" he groans. "It's worth ten thousand bucks, and we gotta give it back to him."

I'm half dead with disgust, but I have to grin when I heard Pop say that. Many a better man than him would have thought twice about givin' Carstairs back his pin. We'd been workin' the ranch for ten years, and he'd got pretty near every cent we made, with his crooked dealing. Most guys would have salved their conscience by arguin' they was only gettin' back what belonged to them. But I gotta hand it to Pop. He wasn't like that.

"Yeah," I agrees, "I'd rather drink pizen. But we gotta do it."

THE swingin' doors open then, and in walks Whetstone. He edges up to the bar and orders sarsaparilla, and Carstairs hurries over and throws his arm around him as if he was a long lost brother, or maybe a rancher with a pocketful of money.

While he is sippin' his drink, Whetstone turns and sees us and scowls. We scowl right back. It makes us both sore to see a ranch owner drinkin' sarsaparilla. Ugh!

"Men," says Mr. Whetstone, when he has finished his drink, "I have in my pocket a check for five thousand dollars. Before I turn it over to Mr. Carstairs I would like to say a few words to you about the value of insurance."

While he is handin' out his line, he reaches into his inside pocket and pulls out the check.

"Mr. Carstairs," he says, "I want to present to you this check, with my compliments. At the same time, I want to congratulate you on yore foresight. No man can foretell the day when adversity will strike."

Carstairs is reachin' for the check, but I can't bring myself to announce that his pin has been found. The idea that he is goin' to get something worth ten thousand, instead of that check for only five thousand, makes me want to die of mortification. But Pop nudges me, and I know I gotta speak my piece.

"Just a minute," I interrupts. "Mr. Carstairs's diamond has been found."

For a minute that bar room looked as if every one had been turned to stone. Carstairs turns toward me, and there is a funny look in his face. The crowd that has been lined up in front of the bar also turns and stares at me.

But I don't savvy that funny look from Carstairs. I'm expectin' him to run over and throw his arm over my shoulder, like he did with Whetstone, and I'm dreadin' it very much.

"Come," says the sheriff testily. "Are you drunk again?"

"No," says I. "I just got some good news for Carstairs."

Then I produces the pin.

For a second or two nobody speaks. I see Carstairs is turnin' a saffron yellow. The rest of his gang are starin' at me with bulgin' eyes.

"Yore pin's been kickin' around in the sawdust for two weeks, Carstairs," I tells him, not wanting any one to

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know that Pop and I had it, but was too dumb to know it was worth anything.

If looks could kill, Carstairs's glare would have eaten my heart out, right there. I see his lips workin', and I know he's callin' me a lot of names, but I can't savvy why. He finally reaches for the pin, and when he does I get an idea.

"Just a second, Carstairs," I says. "C'n you identify yore property?"

"Certainly."

"Is this it?" I asks, holdin' up the pin.

"It is."

"Sure?"

"Positive!"

"Good enough," says I.

Then, addressin' the crowd, I adds, "Any of you numbskulls know a diamond will cut glass . . ."

And with that I draw the stickpin across the window. There is a shrill, back-tingling shriek of glass scratching glass, but there ain't nary a sign of a scrape on the window.

"So it's yours, huh?" I says to Carstairs, grinnin' for the first time since Pop lost the mortgage money.

Carstairs looks like a cornered coyote. He glances at Whetstone, then at the sheriff. They are both lookin' at him, too, and there's a cold gleam in their eyes.

I GOTTA hand it to them guys. It didn't take them long to catch onto Carstairs's game. He'd sold his real diamond and substituted a glass stone, but he'd plumb forgotten to tell the insurance company about it.

Then Carstairs makes a break for the door. Everybody is so surprised they are standin' flat-footed. The sheriff shouts, "Halt!"

I'd forgotten about Pop. He was as surprised as any one, but he was the quickest to get over it. I see his body divin' through the air. He hits Carstairs just below the knees with a tackle that an all-star football player would have been proud of.

Pop swings his left. "That's for gyppin' me outa the mortgage money!" He swings his right. "That's for makin' my pardner worry!" He swings his left again. "An' that's for tryin' to swindle Mr. Whetstone!"

But at that time the sheriff butts in.

"Tsk-tsk! That's no way to treat a prisoner," he says.

"But I don't guess there's any need to quarrel about it.—Have a drink?"

I grins. The sheriff isn't a bad guy, after all. As I'm amblin' up to the bar, Whetstone busts through the crowd and grabs my hand.

"Congratulations!" he exclaims.

"Yeah," says I. "Congratulations is all Pop and me ever get. We'd a darn sight rather had that thousand-dollar reward Carstairs offered."

"I don't see why you won't get it," says Mr. Whetstone. "I'm still holdin' the money."

"Sure," says the sheriff. "Give it to him. He's earned it."

I begin to grin again, real wide.

"Don't bother, Mr. Whetstone," says I. "Just keep it, and tear up that mortgage of ours."

Mr. Whetstone can't understand, either, why I'm so trustful of him, when I was so suspicious of Carstairs.

"That's easy," I replies. "I ain't at all suspicious by nature, but when a crook like Carstairs begins braggin' to me about how honest he is, I'd be a danged fool if I didn't suspect he had something up his sleeve."

THE END

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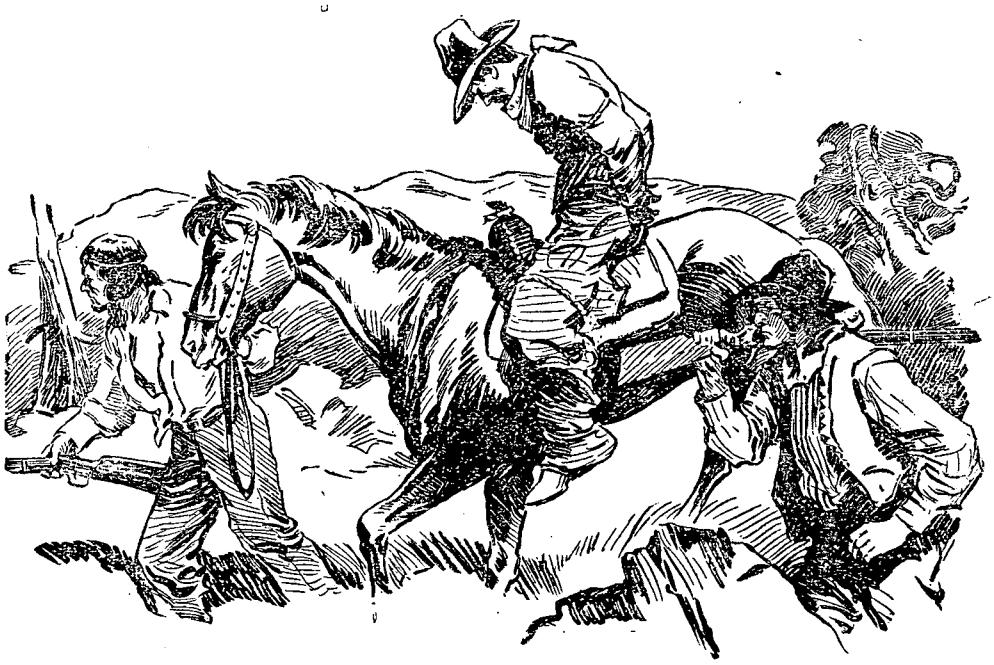

The two half-breeds led Lenister away

Buckshot

By W. C. TUTTLE

Author of "The Santa Claus Trail," "Hashknife Plays a Hunch," etc.

Irish O'Shea had his rangeland enemies on the run—but they were running toward him

LEADING UP TO THIS CONCLUDING INSTALLMENT

A RANGE feud was going full blast in Paint Pot Valley, when Irish O'Shea and Noisy Waters, wandering cowboys, reached the valley looking for work.

Tom Hawks, grizzled veteran, and his two half-breed sons, Mose and Elija, were accused by Dud Palmer, manager of the Box V ranch, of rustling cattle. Ponca Jones, the sheriff, and Windy Grant, his deputy, were not inclined to take sides in the dispute, although Jones insisted that Bill Wing, one of the Box V men, face a coroner's inquest for the killing of Swiftwater Bill Smith when the latter helped the Hawks boys.

A complication was added when Jack Vincent, son of Henry Vincent, owner of the Box V, was shot from ambush and was carried to the Hawks ranch for treatment. Jack immediately fell in love with Joya, Hawks's adopted daughter, much to the chagrin of Mrs. Vincent, who thought Joya was a half-breed.

Jim Brunk and Tex Born, two gunmen, were imported by Dud Palmer in an effort to get Irish and Noisy out of the way. But, in a gun battle, Born, who called himself Black, was killed, and Brunk, although wounded, got back to the Box V. At least Brunk was believed by the sheriff to be the wounded man, although his face had not been revealed during the fight.

Meanwhile, Irish puzzled over two facts he had discovered: that many calves

This story began in the Argosy for February 17.

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in the region were "hair-branded"; and that Slim Francis, who had been murdered before Irish came to the valley, had been killed with steel buckshot.

CHAPTER XV.

A THREAT.

"O'SHEA," said the sheriff, "I want yuh to tell me why them two men tried to dry-gulch yuh. I've been out at the Box V to see Lenister and Harris. They say they knew Black in Wyomin', that he came past the ranch and they rode to town with him. That's all they know. I'm no fool. All along I've figured that you know why it was done. Lenister says mebbe Black came here to get you two. Now, you come clean with me on this deal."

"Sure," grinned Irish. "Black came here to get us."

"That's better. Why did he come to get yuh?"

"I don't know."

"Yuh don't know? Where'd yuh know Black?"

"We never seen him in our lives, until last night."

"The hell yuh didn't!"

"It's a fact."

"Then how do yuh know he came here to git yuh?"

"Proved it, didn't he?"

"Now," sighed the sheriff, "we're right back where we started. Do yuh know a man named Brunk?"

"Jim Brunk, owner of the Box Wagon Wheel?"

"That's the man. Where'd yuh know him?"

"At the Box Wagon Wheel. Me and Noisy was up there the other day. Didn't Windy tell yuh?"

"Windy never told me a damn thing. What was you doin' at the Box Wagon Wheel?"

"Jist a moment, Sheriff. Don'tcha think yo're askin' quite a lot of questions? Even a driftin' cowpuncher has *some* private business."

"Yeah, yo're right, O'Shea."

"Uh-huh. Didn't I see Dud Palmer and the doctor ridin' away a while ago?"

"Yuh did. Ed Lenister accidentally shot Jim Brunk at the Box V."

"Shoot him real bad?"

"Through the thigh."

"Well, that's all right," grinned O'Shea.

"What's all right?"

"I was jist thinkin' out loud. Yuh see, a feller shot through the thigh could still ride a horse. Now, if he'd been shot through the head or the heart I'd believe it was an accident."

"Yuh would, eh?"

"Certainly; he'd never reached the Box V."

The sheriff looked keenly at Irish, a twinkle in his eyes.

"Well, what's the answer, O'Shea?"

"When I find it, I'll let yuh know."

Palmer came back with the doctor. The sheriff met him on the street and Palmer stopped him.

"I'm askin' you a straight question, Ponca; and I expect a straight answer. Are you fellers framin' up to railroad Bill Wing for shootin' Swiftwater Bill?"

The sheriff smiled grimly at the cowman.

"I've never heard of any frame-up, Dud. I reckon you've been listenin' to Windy."

"He talks too damn much, Ponca."

"Mebbe. Is there any doubt in yore mind that it was self-defense?"

"Not a damn bit."

"Then what are yuh scared about?"

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"I'm not goin' to stand for any lyin' at that inquest to-morrow."

"Yea-a-a-ah? Since when did you start bossin' the inquests of this county? The coroner will handle that. And when all is said and done, *you* didn't shoot Swiftwater Bill; so keep yore own nose clean and let the authorities worry about the honesty of their witnesses."

"I'm not tryin' to boss yore damn inquest," growled Palmer. "All I ask is that everybody tells the truth."

"I'll vouch for the two men who wasn't on horseback."

"And I'll vouch for the two men who was on horseback."

"That makes it even, Palmer, so why squall about a frame-up to railroad Bill Wing? If the coroner decides that Bill Wing murdered Swiftwater Bill—they won't hang *you*."

"There yuh go!" wailed Palmer, and walked away.

PONCA JONES was not without a sense of humor. He searched for the coroner and found him in the cool hotel lobby.

"I've been talking with Windy Grant," said the coroner, "and he has created a doubt in my mind about this self-defense shooting."

"He would," grinned Ponca. "But here's the layout, Stillman: Windy and Noisy Waters were both pretty drunk. The bartender will testify to that. You know, a drunken man might not see things right."

"Windy tells a straight story."

"Sure. But would a jury believe him?"

Doctor Stillman laughed shortly. "This inquest has possibilities, Sheriff."

"Possibilities of somebody gettin' hurt before it's finished."

The sheriff moved over to the doorway. A team and a light wagon were coming swiftly up the street, the horse galloping, bodies streaked with lather. It was Jim Vincent and his wife. Both of them had apparently lost their hats, and Vincent had also lost his sense of judgment, because both horses climbed onto the sidewalk, and the right front wheel of the wagon crumpled before Vincent stopped them.

Mrs. Vincent was nearly flung from the seat, and was screaming hysterically when the sheriff reached them.

"Thank God, you're here, Jones!" blurted Vincent. "They've got Jack and Joya!"

"Who's got Jack and Joya?" asked the sheriff anxiously.

"Lord knows. Several masked men. They held us up this side of the ranch and made them go with them."

People were gathering around the crippled equipage. The sheriff helped Mrs. Vincent to the ground, where she almost collapsed. Palmer helped her into the hotel. Irish asked Vincent to be calm about it and give them every bit of information possible. But Vincent did not know exactly how many men there were, nor what they looked like.

"What did they say to yuh?" asked Irish.

"I've told you all I know. Where is my wife?"

"Palmer helped her into the hotel," replied Windy.

"Boys, this is damnable," said Vincent. "I believe it is the same gang that kidnaped us off the Canoga stage. But what are their reasons?"

Palmer came from the hotel and walked up to the sheriff.

"I'll go out and get my outfit, Ponca," he said. "We'll comb this country."

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"All right, Dud. Get back here as soon as yuh can."

Irish leaned against the hotel wall and listened to conjectures. Windy came over and stood beside him.

"What's yore h u n c h ?'' asked Windy.

"It's a little too early in the game, Windy. Wait'll we know why they was kidnaped."

"Are you goin' out with the posse?"

Irish laughed shortly and shook his head.

"What'sa use? The men who stuck them up won't be where any posse will catch sight of 'em. I'm goin' out to the Tomahawk and see if them two boys have enough Apache blood in 'em to follow a dim trail. You go with Ponca Jones; me and Noisy will work alone, except for the Hawks boys."

"Good luck to yuh, Irishman."

IRISH questioned Vincent for the exact spot where he and his wife had been stopped, and then Irish and Noisy went to get horses. Noisy got one which belonged to the stableman, and they rode away ahead of the posse, which was waiting for Palmer and his boys from the Box V.

"The Vincents were goin' back to Canoga on the next stage," said Noisy, as they galloped down the road. "I heard Mrs. Vincent tellin' Palmer that they wasn't goin' back to the Box V, and for him to have their baggage brought to the hotel. It's hard to tell what they'll do now."

"It does kinda put a damper on 'em," agreed Irish.

The ride to the Tomahawk was without incident. They found the spot on the road where the wagon had twisted out of the ruts; but there was nothing there to show what had taken place. The Tomahawk ranch was deserted and the two cowboys decided that Tom Hawks and his two boys were out working cattle.

They waited a while before riding back, and met the posse at the spot where the wagon had turned out. They were milling around, looking at the ground, as the two boys rode up. Palmer had four of his men with him, having left Red Harris to take care of Jim Brunk. There were ten men in the posse, including the sheriff and deputy.

"Any luck?" asked Windy, spurring in close to Irish.

"Nobody home," replied Irish.

The sheriff led the posse up a brushy swale from the road, but Irish and Noisy went on toward town. Noisy would have liked to ride with the posse, but trusted Irish's judgment of what was the best thing to do. They tied their horses in front of the hotel. Vincent and his wife were in the little lobby, waiting anxiously for some news. Irish told him about going out to the Tomahawk.

"I could have saved you that trip," said Vincent wearily. "Tom Hawks and his two sons rode away about the same time that we left there."

"What in the world are we going to do?" sighed Mrs. Vincent.

"Take it easy, Mrs. Vincent," advised Irish. "We've got to wait and see what this means. There's nothin' to go on—yet."

"I'm goin' to take some cold water up to the room and wash up a little," said Noisy. "I feel kinda crisp."

Irish nodded and they went up the stairs.

"That woman's goin' to go loco if she don't quit wringin' her hands," said Noisy as they went down the hall. "And Vincent ain't much better off."

They opened the door and stepped

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inside the room. Noisy headed for the wash stand to get the pitcher, but Irish stopped near the door, looking down at a piece of folded paper, which might have been shoved under their door. He picked it up and unfolded it.

YOU TWO GIT OUT OF THIS COUNTRY DAMN QUIK. KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT AND DRIFT PRONTO OR NOBODY WILL EVER SEE THAT BOY AND GIRL AGIN. WE'VE GOT YOU SPOTED RIGHT AND IF YOU DONT OBAY THIS ORDER—DED PEOPLE TELL NO TALES.

Noisy came over and Irish handed him the note.

"Well, of all the damn things!" snorted Noisy. "Can yuh imagine anythin' like that? Say somethin', can'tcha?"

Irish took a deep breath and shook his head.

"Who the hell left us that note, Irish?"

Irish turned and went back down to the lobby, and Noisy followed him, still carrying the pitcher. They found Uncle Jimmy down there, talking with the Vincents.

"UNCLE JIMMY," said Irish, "have you seen anybody goin' upstairs lately?"

"No, I ain't, O'Shea."

"Were you here when the posse organized?"

"I was right out there in front. They was three men beside the sheriff and the deputy; and then here comes Dud Palmer and his four men. They went right away."

"Did any of 'em come in here?"

"No, they didn't even git off their horses. Anythin' wrong?"

"Not much," replied Irish, and turned to Vincent.

"Are you and Mrs. Vincent goin' out to the Box V?"

"No, I don't believe we will, O'Shea. Bill Wing came out to the Tomahawk this morning to see what we were going to do, and I told him we were going back to San Francisco, and for him to see that our baggage was brought down here. I suppose he wasn't in any hurry, because we'd have to wait for the morning stage, anyway."

The two cowboys went outside and sat down in front of the hotel. There was nothing indefinite about that note. Desperate men had taken desperate measures to drive them out of the country, and Irish had no doubt in his mind that they would carry out their threats. After a period of deep thinking he got abruptly to his feet and motioned for Noisy to follow him. They went down to the stable, where they found the stableman half asleep.

"What's that sorrel horse worth—the one we've got?" asked Irish.

"Twenty-fi' dollars." At least the stableman was honest.

"I'll make yuh a deal. Here's twenty-five dollars. If we bring the horse back within three days you give us twenty dollars and take back the horse."

"Shore, that's all right with me, O'Shea. Hop to it."

They went back to the hotel and sat down again. Irish was nervous; he craved action, but he smoked innumerable cigarettes and was noncommittal. It was nearly supper time when he and Noisy went upstairs and got their warbags. They paid their bill and took the sacks out on the sidewalk, and at the first sign of the posse returning they began tying their sacks on their saddles.

The posse had tried in vain to trail the kidnapers, had nearly ridden the

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shoes off their horses, and came back rather discouraged. Palmer came over to the hotel with the sheriff and deputy. Windy snorted in amazement when he saw the packed war-bags.

"You fellers ain't leavin' here, are yuh?" he asked.

"Yeah, we're pullin' out, Windy," replied Irish. "Sorry to leave yuh, but we got a letter to-day."

"Jobs?" asked the sheriff.

Irish nodded. "Yeah—over in New Mexico."

"Hell, I hate to see yuh goin'. Anyway, Noisy ought to be here for that inquest to-morrow."

"My testimony wouldn't help none," said Noisy. "Let Windy testify for both of us. It's only a legal procedure, anyway."

"Shucks!" growled Windy. "I shore do hate to see yuh pullin' out."

The sheriff shook hands with both of them, but Palmer did not offer to shake hands. Windy gave them both a hearty grip, turned away and went into the hotel.

Bill Wing and Ed Lenister stood in the doorway of the Silver Peso and watched them travel up the road which led to Canoga. Irish and Noisy did not look back, but Irish was chuckling to himself.

"Now," said Noisy, "whereabouts in hell *are* we goin'?"

"We're goin' far enough to make it look like we was goin' a lot farther," replied Irish.

CHAPTER XVI.

AMBUSHED.

ABOUT five or six miles out of Paint City the road to Canoga wound up through a small cañon and out onto a broad mesa. At one point the road narrowed down on a hairpin turn around the corner of an outcropping of sandstone. Here they drew up and Irish dismounted. He handed his reins to Noisy, and found a place where he could climb to the top of the sandstone pile.

"A bird's-eye view of Arizona," he called back to Noisy. "Shove the rollin'-stock in as close to the rocks as yuh can and take life easy."

The purple shadows were fast changing to darkness when Irish came sliding down the rocks. He got quickly into his saddle, and they rode out to block the turn.

"No foolin' with this feller," said Irish. "If yuh have to shoot, cut down close and sock it to him."

"Right," replied Noisy, drawing his gun.

The rider, astride a single-footing horse, came swinging around the curve, and was nearly unseated when the animal stopped abruptly.

It was Ed Lenister, trying to get his balance and look into the muzzles of the two guns at the same time.

"What the hell!" he snorted.

"Keep yore hands shoulder high, Eddie," warned Irish, as Noisy went over and plucked Ed's gun from his holster.

"So that's yore business, is it?" sneered Lenister. "Jist a couple of stick-up boys. Well, yuh won't get much off me, I'll promise yuh that."

"Just where were you goin', Eddie?"

"If it's any of your damn business, I'm goin' to Canoga."

"On pleasure—or jist movin' out?" drawled Irish.

"On business!" snapped Lenister. "Vincent sent me."

"Vincent, eh?"

"Yes, Vincent. I'm taking a telegram to Canoga for him."

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"Yea-a-ah?"

Irish rubbed his chin with his free hand and wondered if this was true. It sounded likely.

"Mind lettin' me see the telegram?" he asked.

"That telegram is none of yore damn business, O'Shea."

"Shall I drag him off his horse and take it away from him?" asked Noisy.

"You try it, you bat-eared *javelina,*" snarled Lenister.

That was all Noisy needed. He grasped Lenister's belt, jerked him clear of the frightened horse and dumped him in the road. Lenister had never been handled so easily in his life, and it took all the fight out of him. Noisy jerked him to his feet, whirled him around and took a short-barreled revolver from his hip pocket.

"Had an ace in the hole, eh?" grunted Noisy. "Now, gimme that telegram."

Cursing bitterly, Lenister dug in his chaps pocket and took out a folded paper, which Noisy handed to Irish. It was written in pencil, and addressed to Clive Adams, Palace Hotel, San Francisco. The telegram read:

SOMETHING HAS HAPPENED TO STOP ME FROM LEAVING THIS HERE PLACE WILL LET YOU KNOW LATER WHEN I KIN LEAVE.
JIM VINCENT.

Irish read it aloud. Noisy heaved a sigh and looked at Lenister, who said:

"I hope you damn savages are satisfied. Give me that telegram."

"I'm satisfied," said Irish dryly.

"You ought to be."

"Git back on yore horse," ordered Irish, and Lenister obeyed quickly, a grin of satisfaction on his thin face.

"Take the rope off his saddle and rope him on tight, Noisy."

"What the hell you talkin' about?" wailed Lenister. "'Ain't you satisfied yet?"

"Yeah — satisfied that yo're a danged liar. Do you think I'm a fool, Lenister? Jim Vincent is a business man; an educated man, who uses good English. He never wrote that telegram. Go ahead and tie him plenty tight, Noisy."

"Damn you, you'll pay for this!" snarled Lenister.

"We won't worry about that," laughed Irish as he watched Noisy tie some intricate knots.

"Do yuh know where there's any water around here, Eddie?" he asked.

"Go to hell!" snapped the angry cowboy.

"No water," said Irish. "I reckon we'll make a dry camp to-night."

JIM VINCENT was greatly disappointed to know that Irish and Noisy had left the country.

"I don't really know why I should, but I expected something of O'Shea," said Vincent as he talked with Palmer and the sheriff in the hotel.

"Just another big-mouthed cowpuncher," said Palmer. "I know his kind."

"I kinda liked 'em both," said the sheriff. "O'Shea seemed to be sort of a thoughtful feller. Anyway, that's my opinion; and I don't know jist why they pulled out, except that they said they got a letter from New Mexico, offerin' 'em jobs. It's a long ways to New Mexico."

"Well, what's to be done, Jones?" queried Palmer. "We've got to do somethin', yuh know."

"I'll do anythin' in the world to find that girl and boy, Palmer—but what's to be done? It strikes me that the best thing to do is to wait and let the kid-

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napers make the move. There must be a reason for the kidnapin', and unless I'm mistaken we'll hear from 'em. It might be that they'll hold Jack Vincent for ransom; but I'll be hanged if I know why they took Joya Hawks. Tom Hawks can't pay no big sum for her; he ain't got it to give."

"It beats me," said Vincent wearily. "But, as you say, it will be best for us to wait. I can't believe that Jack and Joya will be mistreated."

While they were talking, Tom Hawks stalked in, like an old grizzly. The posse had found him and his two boys in the hills and told them the news.

"No news, Ponca?" he asked. The sheriff shook his head.

"Sorry, Tom, but there's nothin' new."

"My boys are out in the hills," said Hawks. "They know every inch of this country, and they're both good trailers. But it's a cold trail, I'm afraid."

"Too cold for trailin' in the dark," said Palmer. "Still, they say an Apache can see in the dark, like a cat."

"I hope you're right," said Hawks, "but I've never seen it demonstrated."

"Hawks," said Palmer, "it has always been said that the Apaches never attacked in the dark. Why was that—fear of the dark?"

"Perhaps," replied Tom Hawks, "if the Apaches could see in the dark their sense of fair play prevented them from doing murder."

"I suppose Geronimo played fair."

"I hold no brief for Geronimo; but the whites made the rules for the game they played with him."

"Anyway," laughed Palmer, "I'm goin' home and get some sleep. See yuh all in the mornin'."

"That inquest will be held at ten o'clock," said the sheriff.

"All right; we'll be here, Jones," Palmer said.

CHAPTER XVII.

PRISONERS.

JOYA and Jack had no idea who their captors were, nor where they were being taken. They had been immediately blindfolded and put on horses, after which they were taken at a gallop for miles. Later they slowed to a walk. Joya realized that they crossed and followed cañons, finally coming back to higher ground after sundown. Again they traveled miles at a slow pace, finally stopping.

She had no chance to talk with Jack. In fact, she did not know whether he was with her or not. She listened closely, hoping to hear some one speak, so she might identify the voice; but there was no conversation. Later she felt that some one else had joined them, and she heard the low mutter of conversation. Following this her horse was led on again, and in possibly fifteen minutes of slow travel they stopped again and she was taken out of the saddle. No one spoke, but a firm grip on her elbow guided her and she entered a house, where she was roped to a chair.

Joya realized that there was no use in asking questions; so she kept her lips tightly shut. By keeping quiet she might escape a gag, of which she had a horror. Long after all sounds had ceased she took a chance.

"Jack!" she said softly.

"Joya! You here?" replied Jack. "They didn't hurt you?"

"No, I'm not hurt."

"Thank God! But what does it all mean, Joya?'

"I haven't any idea," she replied.

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"No one has spoken to me since we were ordered out of the wagon."

"It's the same with me. Why, it's uncanny. But I was afraid they might take you away somewhere. I don't really mind it so much, now that I know you are here and feeling all right."

"Yes, I'm all right, but these ropes are awful tight."

"Mine too. I've tried to loosen my hands, but it's no use. Have you any idea where we might be, Joya?"

"Not the slightest; but I'm afraid they have taken us to Mexico. I know we started south, but we twisted around so many times I lost all sense of direction."

"Mexico, eh?" mused Jack. "Why Mexico?"

"Because they'd feel safe from pursuit. A posse would never go into Mexico."

"Well, my dear, we must wait and see what happens."

IRISH O'SHEA awoke and looked up at the fading stars. He was chilled from sleeping on the ground, and some sixth sense told him that everything was not just right. Ed Lenister, tied tightly, was stretched out between Irish and Noisy, who was still snoring. Cautiously Irish lifted his head. There were two gray shapes humped up on the ground only a few feet away, and Irish saw the glint of starlight on a rifle barrel.

"Don't move," warned a soft voice.

"Huh!" Noisy snorted and sat upright. He was a light sleeper.

"Don't move."

"Who the hell is it?" asked Lenister hopefully.

"I'll be a liar if it ain't Mose and Elija Hawks!" exclaimed Irish. "Howdy, boys?"

"Don't move," repeated Mose Hawks. "What you do here, O'Shea?"

"Speak yore little piece, damn yuh," chuckled Lenister.

"You keep yore beak out of this," warned Noisy.

"Who's that—Ed Lenister?"

"Sure," laughed Irish. "A friend of yours, Mose."

"That's a lie," retorted the young half-breed vehemently.

"Where's Joya?" asked Elija.

"That's what we want to know," replied Irish. "You been lookin' for her?"

"Most all night. We find you."

Irish rolled and lighted a cigarette. He knew it would be impossible to explain things to these two boys. Anyway, it would take too long. He looked at Mose for several moments.

"Mose," he said, "do you trust me and my pardner?"

Mose took this under advisement.

"Yeah," he said finally. "You all right, my father say."

"Fine. I want you and Elija to take Ed Lenister to your ranch and see that he's tied up plenty tight, *sabe?* Don't let anybody see him. And tell yore father to be in Paint City for the inquest."

"Don't do that," wailed Lenister. "Don't turn me over to them damn Apaches."

Mose grinned widely. This appealed to him—taking in a prisoner.

"Good!" decided Elija. "I bring Ed's horse."

"Listen t' me," wailed Lenister. "They'll scalp me, I tell yuh."

"They're only half-breeds; so they'll only half-scalp yuh," replied Noisy. "Kinda leave it flappin' on one side."

"Yo're a couple damn murderers!"

"Scalpin' don't allus kill yuh," said

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Noisy. "I knowed one of the old timers up in Wyomin' that had been scalped. He was allus a little tender on top, but that was all. He was scalped by a Sioux, he said. They take off a awful hunk. These Apaches don't strip yuh below the ears, and they allus leave eyebrows."

Mose and Elija made no comments, as they roped Lenister to his saddle.

"Our horses half-mile away," they told Irish. "So long."

Lenister had nothing to say, but he was probably thinking a lot. Irish and Noisy went back to the road. It was breaking day as they galloped down the road.

"I hope I never make an enemy out of an Apache," said Irish. "Them jiggers shore know how to move in on yuh—settin' there like a couple gray ghosts, Winchesters lined up on us. I'll betcha they smelled us half a mile away."

"That's what I been a-tellin' yuh all the time," said Noisy. "And even at that yuh can't brag much on an Injun's nose, if he smelled you at a half-mile. Them ten-cent socks—"

"Aw, shut up! Shake up that two-bit bronc a little, and let's git goin'."

BREAKFAST was over at the Box V ranch. Dud Palmer and Bill Wing sat on the front porch of the ranch house, and Palmer kept his pair of old field-glasses trained on the road. Down at the corral, Harry Keller, Joe McClelland and Dan Mason were saddling five horses. It was nearly time to go to Paint City, if they were to attend the inquest.

Palmer scowled as he lowered the glasses.

"No sign, eh?" queried Bill Wing. Palmer shook his head angrily.

"Damn Lenister!" he snorted. "He should be here long before this. With that horse he was ridin' he should have been back here by daylight."

"Prob'ly got drunk in Canoga," said Bill Wing.

"He knows better than that, Bill."

"Mebbe somethin' happened to him."

"Somethin' will happen to him, when I git my hands on him."

Bill Wing laughed shortly. "I wouldn't hop Ed too hard, Dud; he's *mucho malo hombre.*"

Palmer grunted angrily and devoted himself to the glasses again. The three cowboys came up from the corral, leading the horses. Red Harris came from the house.

"I'm stayin' here, eh?" he asked.

"You stay with Jim Brunk," replied Palmer, getting to his feet. "And when Ed Lenister shows up, you tell him to come to town as fast as he can."

"He'll probably go straight to town," said Bill Wing as he fastened on his spurs. "Ready to go, Dud?"

"Oh, I reckon so. I'd like to scalp Ed. Well, let's go. Here's the glasses, Red."

"I can see enough without any damn glasses," growled Red. He watched the five men ride away and went into the main room, where Jim Brunk was stretched out on a couch.

"Have they gone, Red?" asked Brunk.

"Yeah. How's your leg?"

"Pretty sore. If I could ride, I'd get to hell out of here."

"I wish yuh could, Brunk; I'm tired of hearin' yuh bellyache about a little bullet hole in yore leg."

"Wait'll you get one through yore leg—you'll bellyache, too."

"Not me."

Brunk laughed shortly and looked at the ceiling.

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"Red, I was jist wonderin' if Palmer thinks that everybody in this valley is a damn fool except himself," he said.

"Did that idea jist strike yuh, Brunk? Hell, I've wondered that for a year. I'm just about through with Palmer. Yessir, I'm just about through with Palmer."

"Yo're *all* through with Palmer, Red!"

Red whirled like a flash. Standing in the doorway which led to the kitchen was Irish O'Shea, his gun covering the startled Red.

"All right, Noisy!" called Irish, and Noisy came through the front doorway, a grin on his face. He quickly disarmed Red, backed him against the wall, while Irish searched the wounded Brunk for a weapon, which he did not have.

"What's this all about?" asked Red tensely.

"Oh, jist a little experiment," grinned Irish.

"I thought you had left the country," said Brunk harshly.

"That's what Lenister thought," laughed Irish. "Ain't it funny how a feller like Lenister goes yaller in a pinch?"

"Yaller?" gasped Red. "He—went—yaller?"

"A streak a foot wide down the middle of his back."

"The dirty rattler!" gritted Red.

"Shut up, you damn fool!" rasped Brunk. "Lenister never went yellow. They're bluffin'."

"Bluffin'?" queried Irish. "Am I, Brunk? Or was Lenister lyin' when he told me about the B and P Cattle Company, owners of the Star Lightnin' brand?"

Brunk's eyes were full of fear, but he shut his lips tightly.

"Get a couple ropes, Noisy," said Irish. "We've got work to do."

CHAPTER XVIII.

STERN JUSTICE.

TOM HAWKS came to town early that morning. Neither of the Vincents went to bed. Even the sheriff spent a sleepless night. He was worried over several things. One of his problems was what to do about Jim Brunk. There was no doubt in his mind that Brunk was the man who was with Black in the attempted murder of O'Shea and Waters. But O'Shea and Waters were gone now. The sheriff took it up with Windy.

"Ain't nothin' yuh can do," said Windy. "If O'Shea and Waters don't want to charge Brunk with dry-gulchin', you can't. Anyway, Black and Brunk got the worst of the deal. I'd fergit that."

"I suppose I might as well forget it, Windy. We're goin' to hold the inquest in the hotel dinin' room. Uncle Johnny offered us the use of the room."

"That's a good place to hold it."

"I guess it'll do. You've been tryin' to scare Bill Wing on this inquest, and I'm wonderin'—"

"Wonderin' what?"

"Wonderin' how you'll testify."

"Well, you don't need to wonder. I'm goin' to tell the truth."

"And have 'em prove that you was drunk."

"What if they do? I'm no pillar of the church. Everybody knows I'm liable to git drunk. If you think that'll besmirch my reputation, forgit it. I tell yuh, Bill Wing murdered Swiftwater Bill."

"You'll prob'ly start trouble," sighed the sheriff.

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"Prob'ly," agreed Windy. "Ponca, did you ever wonder why Bill Wing shot the old cook?"

"He says Swiftwater Bill was goin' to shoot him."

"Bull! Why did Swiftwater Bill make 'em turn the Hawks boys loose?"

"Drunk."

Windy sighed and shook his head. "I wish O'Shea had stayed here."

"Well, he didn't. I could have forced Noisy Waters to stay here to testify. Wish I had, damn it. But they'd have prob'ly made drunken liars out of both of yuh, instead of jist one."

"I might have been drunk," admitted Windy, "but I'll pistolwhip the first galoot that says I'm lyin' about what happened."

"The longer I talk with you, the more scared I am over this inquest," said the sheriff wearily.

"I've got Doc Stillman on my side," grinned Windy. "He'd be tickled stiff to make a murder out of it. He's ambitious, Doc is. What you ought to do is to git sick at the last moment and let me and Doc run it."

"I'll run it," replied Ponca Jones grimly. "It won't be any place for timid folks, I can see that."

Apparently the happenings around Paint City were of enough interest to bring several people from Canoga, including the prosecuting attorney. They knew nothing about the kidnaping until they arrived in Paint City, where it was the subject of conversation.

"We'll stop this sort of thing, even if we have to call troops," declared the prosecuting attorney. "The arm of the law can reach into Mexico, if necessary."

"And git its fingers burnt, as usual," grunted Windy.

At about nine-thirty the five men from the Box V rode in. The sheriff pointed out Bill Wing to the prosecutor as the man who had killed Swiftwater Bill Smith. The prosecutor had all the facts of the case.

"I wish you had held this man Waters," he said. "At least he could corroborate Windy's testimony."

"They left for Canoga last night."

AT ten minutes to ten Tom Hawks and his two boys rode into town. All three men were heavily armed. The sheriff looked them over with misgivings. Paint City had the nucleus of a battle. He went to talk matters over sanely with Tom Hawks.

"We are here because Irish O'Shea asked us to be here," said Tom Hawks.

"But O'Shea and his pardner left for Canoga last night, Tom."

"I know they did," replied Hawks. "But this morning Mose and Elija came home, bringing Ed Lenister, roped and plenty mad. He had been a prisoner of O'Shea and Waters all night. They turned him over to Mose and Elija, told them to take him to my ranch for safe keeping, and sent word for me to be here at the inquest."

"Well, great lovely dove!" snorted the sheriff. "What in hell is it all about, Tom? What has Lenister done?"

"I don't know, Ponca. You're the only one I'm telling."

"Well, I'll tell yuh, Tom; there's been too damn many people tied up around this country. I'm sick of it. I never gave O'Shea and Waters any authority to capture and tie up anybody. It seems to me that they're takin' a hell of a lot upon themselves. What did Ed Lenister have to say?"

"He begged me to let him go, and when I refused he asked me to tell Dud Palmer where he was."

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"Are you goin' to tell Palmer?"

"I am not, because I've still got faith in Irish O'Shea. Lenister is scared stiff over something."

"I'll set tight," decided the sheriff. "Mebbe I better tell Windy. Keep yore boys in the background, Tom. They're like a red rag to that Box V outfit; and we don't want anybody killed."

"My boys always stay in the background, Ponca."

"Yeah, I know they do. I dunno. Damn it, I'm the sheriff, and I don't know half what's goin' on. Well, I'll talk with Windy, and then I'll find a soft spot for my knees and do a lot of prayin'."

The hotel dining room was quickly filled with people. The prosecuting attorney, by virtue of his official position, elected himself as first assistant to the coroner, who opened the inquest with a brief statement of facts about the case in question.

"Edward Melchoir, take the witness stand," said the coroner, and the bartender of the Silver Peso got quickly to his feet.

"I never seen a damn thing," he said and sat down.

"Git up here in this chair!" snapped the sheriff, and Ed went lumbering up there, a scowl on his face. He was quickly sworn. The jury consisted of Johnny Goodnight, Dan Ames, owner of the Silver Peso; Charley Cordray, stage line manager; Ike Waters, blacksmith, and two men from Canoga, Henry Rice and Al Fenway.

All the boys from the Box V were seated down in front. Bill Wing was nervously trying to watch the coroner and the jury at the same time.

"Melchoir, did you see this shooting?" asked the coroner.

"I did not," replied the witness. "All I know is that Windy Grant and Noisy Waters walked out to the doorway. Stillwater Bill stepped back from the bar and looked out. Then he says, 'Why, them dirty crooks,' and out he went. I heard him say for Palmer and Bill Wing to put 'em up high. I didn't know what it was all about until after the shot was fired and I got out there."

"Why did he refer to Bill Wing and Dud Palmer as dirty crooks?"

"I never had no chance to ask him."

DUD PALMER got to his feet quickly.

"Excuse me," he said, "but there's no evidence that he didn't mean Windy Grant and Waters."

"Pass the buck, Dud," laughed Windy.

"Set down, Palmer," ordered the sheriff. "You'll have yore chance to talk."

"And I'll talk!" snapped Palmer. "No drunken cow waddie is goin' to railroad Bill Wing, if I can help it."

"I'm no drunken cow waddie, you bug-eyed tarantaler!" snapped Ed Melchoir.

"Nobody's talkin' about you," replied Palmer angrily.

"Yo're howlin' before yo're hurt, Palmer," laughed Windy.

"Will you fellers shut yore yaps?" roared the sheriff.

"Ask Ed why Swiftwater Bill said he quit the Box V," requested Windy.

"If it has any bearing on this investigation, I'll ask it," replied the coroner.

"He quit because I wouldn't let him get drunk on the job," said Palmer quickly.

"Let the witness answer," said the coroner severely.

"Well," replied Ed reluctantly, "I heard him say there was two ends to some sort of a deal, and that he was in

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the middle. He said he couldn't play that sort of a game any longer. He said he had too much conscience."

"Was he mad at anybody on the Box V?"

"He didn't say if he was or not."

"That's all, Melchoir. Bill Wing, take the stand and be sworn."

Bill Wing tried to be nonchalant and nearly missed the chair when he sat down.

"Why did you shoot Swiftwater Bill Smith?" asked the coroner.

"To keep him from shootin' me and Dud Palmer."

"Are you sure that was his intention?"

"I shore am."

"Why would he shoot you and Dud Palmer?"

"Well, he—he was crazy drunk."

"I see. I suppose that every time he got crazy drunk he shot you and Dud Palmer. Was it a habit with him?" the coroner said.

Bill Wing gasped for breath.

"As I understand it," continued the coroner coldly, "you and Dud Palmer had your hands in the air. Am I right?"

Bill Wing nodded quickly.

"Then how were you able to lower your right arm, grasp your gun, draw it from the holster and kill Swiftwater Bill? Was he so drunk that he couldn't see you doing this?"

"I—uh—well, I dunno."

Bill Wing looked appealingly at Dud Palmer.

"Yes," said Bill, "I reckon he was too drunk to—to know much."

"Then," said the coroner, "you deliberately shot down a man who was too drunk to know what was going on. Am I right?"

"Mebbe he was; I dunno."

"Then your only reason for shooting him was because you were afraid he might shoot you?"

"That's right."

"As I understand it, Swiftwater Bill had been cooking at the Box V a long time. Have you and Palmer ever had any serious trouble with him? I mean, has he ever threatened either of you?"

"No, he ain't never threatened nobody, as far as I know."

BILL WING was excused, and after the coroner and the prosecuting attorney had held a short conference, Windy Grant was called to the stand.

"Now we'll hear some drunken guesses," said Palmer.

"Yeah," grinned Windy, "and the seat of yore pants is gittin' awful hot on that chair, Dud."

Windy's testimony was clear and concise. He told of the drinking bout that he and Noisy Waters had with Swiftwater Bill, and of how Palmer and Wing had brought the two Hawks boys to Paint City. He said they had refused to turn their prisoners over to him, and then told in detail how Swiftwater Bill appeared on the scene. His testimony showed that after the two boys had been released and were far down the street, Swiftwater Bill lowered his gun and was watching the boys riding away.

"And while he wasn't lookin'," concluded Windy, "Bill Wing pulled his gun and killed Swiftwater Bill."

"What happened immediately after the shot was fired?" asked the coroner. "Did they dismount, or anything?"

"They whirled their horses around and took out after the Hawks boys. If you want to question the Hawks boys, they're at the back of the room, with their father."

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Palmer got quickly to his feet.

"I think this has gone far enough," he said. "I've listened to lies until I'm tired. I knew what was bein' done, and I'll—"

"You'll come up here and be sworn," finished the coroner.

Palmer kicked his chair aside and strode up to the front, where he glared at Windy.

"Where's Ed Lenister?" asked Windy.

"He's out at the ranch with Red Harris," snapped Palmer.

"Want to make a little bet on it?"

"This is not a gambling house," reminded the coroner.

Palmer shot a questioning glance toward his men in the front row, but their faces were blank, eyes puzzled. They were all asking themselves why Windy Grant had mentioned Ed Lenister. Palmer's eyes shifted to the door which led to the hotel lobby. There stood Tom Hawks and his two sons, watching grimly.

"You tell your story, Mr. Palmer," said the coroner.

"Huh?" Palmer looked blankly at him for a moment. "Oh, yeah. Well, as a matter of fact, I fired Swiftwater Bill Smith. He acted funny lately. Didn't seem to know what he was doin' most of the time; so I asked him what was wrong and he gave me a short answer. I told Bill Wing at the time that Swiftwater was actin' funny. Well, it went on for a while, and I finally told him he'd have to change his ways if he was goin' to keep his job. So I—"

"Are you merely explaining that you fired Swiftwater Bill?" asked the coroner.

"I aimed to show that he was sore at me. You asked Bill if there had been any trouble with the cook."

"We will pass that," said the coroner dryly. "I want to hear your version of the shooting."

"Well, I seen it the same as Bill Wing did. I'd have shot him myself if I was as fast with a gun as Bill Wing. I tell yuh, I shore was scared."

"Before or after, Dud?" asked Windy.

"Will you keep yore nose out of this?" snapped Palmer angrily.

"That's right—I thought it was *afterwards.*"

"And another thing," said Palmer. "It seems to me that the defendant in this case should have had somethin' to say about that jury. Johnny Goodnight has made cracks about what ought to be done to Bill Wing. Goodnight never seen the shootin'. I tell yuh, we're bein' framed. I can see damned plain that we won't git no square deal in this place, and I won't stand for it. C'mon, boys."

PALMER stepped off the stand and headed for the doorway, with his men trailing behind him.

"Palmer, you can't do this," protested the sheriff.

"I've told you what I'd do," retorted Palmer hotly, and led the men into the lobby.

But Palmer was not going to stop there; he was going to the ranch. That jury was going to hold Bill Wing for superior court, and Palmer wanted to give Bill a chance for a getaway. He shoved Bill ahead of him out onto the sidewalk, a roar of protesting voices coming from the dining room.

"Our horses!" gasped Bill Wing.

The Silver Peso hitch-rack was bare of horses.

"Gone!" grunted Palmer in amazement. "Somebody—look! It's Red Harris!"

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A rider had swung into the street, lashing his running horse. Red Harris had slipped off the ropes Irish and Noisy had tied him with, and was game enough to bring a warning. He jerked his horse to a sliding stop in the middle of the street, sprang out of his saddle and ran to the group from the Box V. Red was hatless, his usually florid face the color of ashes.

"Git out of here!" he screamed. "O'Shea and Waters came back. Yo're trapped, you fools!"

Spitting a curse, Palmer dashed for the one horse in sight; and Bill Wing had the same idea. The animal tried to whirl away from them, but the lunging Palmer caught the reins. Bill Wing, with more foresight, was into the saddle, trying to spur the horse loose from Palmer.

Screaming a curse at Bill Wing, Palmer jerked out his gun and fired point-blank at Bill Wing.

The horse, rearing wildly from the crash of the heavy shot fired almost against its ear, jerked away from Palmer, throwing him to his knees, and as he went down Bill Wing fired one shot down at him.

Palmer went flat on his face in the dirt, and when the horse whirled around Bill Wing slid limply from the saddle, and the animal went galloping down the street.

"Gawd!" breathed Red Harris, and swung around to see Irish, Noisy, Windy and the two Hawks boys behind them, guns in hand.

"What's all the shootin' about?" asked Irish calmly.

"Keep yore hands steady, you Box V's!" snapped Noisy. "Mose, you and Elija collect a few guns."

The sheriff shoved his way to the sidewalk, followed by the prosecuting attorney and the coroner. The coroner was the first to examine Palmer and Wing.

Swiftly he investigated.

"Send for your local doctor," he said. "These men will live."

The boys from the Box V seemed to have been shocked to inaction. Even the fiery Red Harris stood there dumbly, looking into the street.

Some one was shouting inside the hotel that Jack and Joya were there. The sheriff and Windy linked Keller, McClelland, Mason and Red Harris together. None protested.

"I was a damn fool," said Harris bitterly. "Why didn't I hit for the hills? Palmer and Wing played the game of every man for himself."

THE sheriff came up to Irish, followed by the prosecutor.

"I can't git head nor tail of this, O'Shea," confessed the sheriff. "Why did Palmer and Wing shoot each other?"

"Tryin' to dodge a rope. They both wanted that getaway horse."

"They found Jack Vincent and the Hawks girl at the Box V!" exclaimed Windy. "Can yuh imagine that for somethin' funny!"

Jim Vincent came out, shoved some of the men aside and held out his hand to Irish, who grinned as they shook hands.

"This thing started about a year ago," explained Irish. "Brunk and Palmer started the B & P Cattle Company, in Mojave County, where they registered the Star Lightnin' brand. Then they got that location at Paradise Springs and registered the Box Wagon Wheel. Bein' fourth owner of the Box V wasn't enough for Palmer; so they hair-brained Box V's and Tomahawk brands, herded 'em to Paradise Springs and rebranded Box V to a Box Wagon

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Wheel, and made the Tomahawks into the Star Lightnin'.

"I think I'm right when I say that the Box V outfit was takin' a herd over to Paradise Springs at the time Vincent was due to come here with his family. Palmer and Bill Wing pulled that kidnapin', in order to keep Vincent away until the outfit got back. Twenty-four hours was plenty. Ponca, if you'll remember, it was Palmer who suggested lookin' at that old house, the day we found the Vincent family there. Palmer was ready to have them found.

"Somehow Slim Francis knew about this crooked work and wouldn't play the game with them. They shot him with Jack Vincent's shotgun, loaded with a cartridge that Jack Vincent had made up as an experiment. It was loaded with ball bearings from an old bicycle that had belonged to Swiftwater Bill. I've got the gun, showin' what steel shot will do to a shotgun barrel, and I found a lot of them ball-bearings inside the ribs of Slim Francis's skeleton.

"Poor old Swiftwater Bill knew all about this rustlin', and he'd come to the point where he couldn't play the game against Vincent, and he didn't want to squeal on Palmer.

"Bill Wing killed him to shut his mouth," Irish finished.

"Well, great lovely dove!" snorted the sheriff. "And was it them that kidnaped Jack Vincent and the Hawks girl?"

"Why did they do that?" asked the prosecutor.

Irish produced the note he had found in their room.

"That's why we pulled out," he said. "That was the ransom they demanded. Red," he said, turning to Red Harris, "how much did you folks think I knew?"

"I dunno," replied Red dully. "They only talked about yore testimony at this inquest. But Brunk said you knowed too much, or yuh wouldn't have come to Paradise Springs like yuh did. Course Brunk got scared of yuh, after yuh killed Tex Born—the feller who called himself Black. One of yuh got Brunk in the leg, and he didn't wait to see if Tex got killed. I didn't like the idea of that kidnapin', but Palmer swore they wasn't goin' to hurt the kids. All they wanted was to force you fellers out until after the inquest, and they'd turn 'em loose. It was one of them misbranded Star Lightnin' yearlin's that Mose and Elija had that day. It started the trouble."

"Thank yuh, Red. How about you writin' out a confession to the whole thing?"

"I can't write a lick," replied Red. "You write it and I'll sign it."

"Mebbe I don't know it all."

"Well, you know more'n I do; so hop to it."

"What about Lenister?" asked Windy.

"Oh, he's out at the Tomahawk, all tied up. Yuh see, after we left Palmer wanted to be sure we went all the way; so he sent Lenister to Canoga to watch us. Lenister had a fake telegram, which he said Vincent wrote and asked him to take to Canoga. We picked up Lenister out here a few miles, and this mornin' we turned him over to Mose and Elija."

"Well," said the sheriff, "I reckon we've cleaned out one of the worst gangs we ever had in this country."

"*We* put handcuffs on some of 'em," said Windy. "I reckon we better foller on down to the doctor's office and see how them two fellers are gittin' along."

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"You stay here and take care of the chain-gang," said the sheriff. "I'll do the investigatin'."

IRISH walked into the hotel, where the crowd was still milling around, trying to tell each other what it was all about. Vincent took Irish by the arm and led him up the stairs. Neither of them spoke. The door of the room was open. Mrs. Vincent sat in a rocker near the center of the room, looking weary, but grim. Joya stood near the doorway, and Jack was standing with his back to them, looking through the window.

Irish smiled at Mrs. Vincent. "Everythin' is all right now, ain't it?" he asked.

"No," she replied. "No, it isn't."

Jack turned and came back to the center of the room.

"As a matter of fact," said Jack, "everything *will* be all right. Mother has given her consent to our marriage, if I will go back to San Francisco and become a lawyer. Joya told her about being the adopted daughter of Tom Hawks. Joya is a white girl, you know."

"Well, that's great!" exclaimed Irish.

"But Joya won't leave Arizona—and she don't care for law."

Joya looked at Irish and smiled.

"Neither do I," grinned Irish. "Vincent, why don't yuh give them the Box V. They might even elect a good cowman Governor of this old State. Jist because I've never been elected—how about it, Mrs. Vincent?"

"Oh, I suppose so," she replied. "Only get me out of here. If I ever get near a bath again I'll never leave."

"Cleanliness is next to godliness," laughed Irish, "but I never heard it used as an aid to Cupid."

Jack stepped across the room to take Joya in his arms, and Irish went out, grinning back at them. Vincent caught him in the lobby and handed him a check. It was undated, the amount unfilled, but it was signed by Jim Vincent.

"I always keep my promise, O'Shea," he said.

Irish walked over to the desk, picked up an old pen and wrote on the check:

ONE GOOD HORSE

"It's to replace the one Brunk killed," said Irish. "Now, I'm goin' down and collect twenty dollars from that stableman; and then me and Noisy are goin' to fold ourselves around a lot of ham and eggs."

Vincent laughed softly as he looked at the check.

"I'll give you a hundred horses, O'Shea."

"We don't expect to go that far," grinned Irish. "One is plenty. Give the other ninety-nine to Jack and Joya."

And Irish O'Shea, without a care on his mind, went down the street to collect enough money to pay for the ham and eggs.

THE END

A W. C. TUTTLE
"Hashknife" Story Coming Soon

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Another Man's Poison

By DOUGLAS LEACH

Doc used both fists and some of the furniture

Doc Sewell thought poaching and smuggling in Australia were too tame for his talents

IT was through Charlie, the bartender of the Southern Cross Hotel in Torresville, in the Northern Territory of Australia, that me and Doc went into the land agency business. And what a lemon that turned out to be! After it was all over we come to the conclusion that it was a dirty racket and that we'd do better to go back to something honester, like poaching paradise feathers or running contraband into Papua. Something, as Doc said, "where our natural gifts could be put to more profitable use."

This Torresville was like most of them North Australian towns—a sun-blistered little burg with a bit of a harbor and the usual hotel, and back of the town a coupla big cattle stations. There was a few mines, but Torresville lived mostly on the cattle.

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Me and Doc Sewell had just come from pearling round Broome, and for once we'd made a fair stake, and we had a square-sailed lugger of our own anchored in the harbor. There was a rumor of a gold-strike up on Mulla Flats, and if it hadn't been for Charlie we'd have gone there.

He was a nice feller, Charlie. A big, raw-boned Aussie with freckles on his bare arms as big as dimes. And could he mix drinks? He'd been slinging 'em across the mahogany all his life, and he was wasted on a hick burg like Torresville.

"These blokes didn't know nothing better than swillin' beer and rum when I first came," he tells us, "but I'm educating 'em fast."

No fooling, he was a genius at his job. I useta think these here cocktails was sissy drinks, but not after I'd tasted them of Charlie's. Some was highbrow drinks, like Blue Lightning and Hot River, and others was roughneck stuff, such as Greasy Skids and Tiger Blackshot.

"Inventin' the booze is easy," says Charlie. "It's thinkin' up the names that's the difficult part. Try some of this," and he hands us a little yeller likker that gets right down into the soles of our feet and wraps us in a sorta pleasant melancholy.

"How d'you like it?" he asks.

"Fine," says Doc.

"I call it Tombstone Wine," Charlie says. "Not bad, eh?"

Me and Doc said we thought it was a swell name, and after that Charlie was our friend for life. That was how he come to advise us not to go to Mulla Flats.

"You coves are always crazy to go somewhere back in the bush to make yer fortune when there's plenty of money to be made close at 'ome," he says. "Why, I know of a sweet little thousand quid to be made right in this town. All you need is a good line of talk."

"Is it honest?" asks Doc.

"Too right," says Charlie. "Straight business."

"Oh," says Doc, kinda disappointed. "What is it?"

"Selling land," answers Charlie. "Narrabindi station. The nearest boundary fence is three miles south of here. A thousand quid commission. And I've got a buyer for you stayin' in this hotel. All you got to do is to make contac'."

"Why don't you sell it yourself?" Doc wants to know. Doc is always skeptical.

THEN Charlie explained. It seemed that this bozo he had in mind, though lousy with jack, was a "wowser." And a wowser, in Australia, is a guy what's dead against drink, gambling, or any harmless fun whatsoever. Naturally he wouldn't have nothing to do with a barkeep like Charlie.

"My only chance is to work through a second party," says Charlie. "And though I'm agent for Norton, who owns Narrabindi, I'll make you my sub-agent for a cut of the commish. Got it?"

"Is this prospective buyer a cattleman?" asks Doc.

"No," Charlie says. "It's much easier than that. 'E's a well-known philanthropist, name of Melling, from Sydney, and 'e wants the land to start a settlement for converted aborigines or something. If 'e was a real stockman 'e'd know Narrabindi ain't worth anywheres near the twenty thousand quid Norton is arskin' for it. 'E's green and innercent as a little child, and a

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free spender. There ain't but one snag."

"What's that?" grunts Doc.

"Jim Hoghan," Charlie tells us. "'E's agent for Mirralloo station, which is also up for sale, and 'e's after Melling, too. Narrabindi is poor land, but Mirralloo is worse. Mostly spinifex and desert. It don't look so bad now because they've just 'ad rain, but it only rains about wunst every ten years. Still, Hoghan is a shrewd bloke, with a bit of money behind 'im, and 'e'll hook Melling if you ain't quick. Watch out for yourself, though. Hoghan is a bad one to cross, my oath! Runs around with a very tough push."

"I'd like to meet this Melling," says Doc.

"'E don't often come down before noon," announces Charlie.

So while we was waiting he got out a map and showed us Narrabindi and told us all about it. And I wanta tell you that these here Australian cattle stations ain't no quarter-section homesteads, but about as big as Illinois, or maybe Missouri.

Finally a little plump guy comes out onto the veranda.

"That's 'im," mutters Charlie. "Go to it!"

Mister, one look at Melling and you could see he was the answer to the land-shark's prayer. He had round eyes, with steel-rimmed specs that made him look for all the world like an owl, and considerable of a bulge round his equator. Yeah, he was nearly as fat as Doc, but instead of being hard-looking he was soft and pudgy. He had a kinda nervous smile, and was all the time wiping his hands on his pants and fumbling at his collar.

Now Doc had a way with him, for all he looked so tough, and he could talk smooth as honey when he wanted to. He buttonholed Melling, and although Melling seemed a bit scared Doc broke the ice by saying how he'd heard Melling was interested in the aborigine question, and how studying the blackfellow had been his own life work.

"Perhaps you've read my book on the origin of the Australian native dialects?" he asks.

Melling says he hasn't, but he'd certainly like to, and in next to no time the three of us was sitting in chairs talking away like we'd knowed each other since we was little boys at school. Doc and Melling talked about aborigines for a solid hour, and Melling brung out some photographs of missions he'd founded down in Queensland, and whilst he was showing us 'em a newspaper cutting fell out. I picked it up, and it was a picture of him being thanked by the mayor of Brisbane for his generosity in donating a bunch of dough to some college or other. Melling blushed like a big girl with a hole in her stocking, and stuttered, and grabbed at the cutting.

"You don't want to take any notice of what they say in the papers," he says. "They exaggerate."

He tried to be modest about all the good he had did, but you could see he was really proud of it. It seemed a shame to sell such a decent old bozo a lemon like Narrabindi, but as he'd been giving money away all his life there wasn't no reason why me and Doc shouldn't grab some of it.

He was awful narrer-minded, though, and when, thinking how lousy rich he was, I suggested a little game of stud, he kinda froze.

"I never indulge in games of chance," he says, very cold.

It wasn't no game of chance the way me and Doc played it, mister, but I

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seen I'd pulled a bone, and Doc gives me a dirty look and changed the subject.

After a while Melling mentioned how he was looking for land, and it wasn't till then that Doc told him about Narrabindi, and offered to hire a buckboard and show him over as much of it as they could cover in a day. Melling was interested all right, and finally went away saying he'd think it over.

AFTER he'd gone a dark, slim bozo drifted out from the bar and took the chair Melling had left. He bites the end off a cigar, lights up, and says, very soft and menacing: "Lay off him! He's my pigeon."

"That so?" murmurs Doc, narrering them cold, hard eyes of his. "Who're you?"

"Hoghan," says this bird.

And right then the veranda filled up kinda gradual and inconsequential with about the toughest bunch of penitentiary scourings you'd ever hope to see. Burned, slab-sided Aussies, very long and very wide, and with pans on 'em that looked like they been chopped outa iron-bark wood with a blunt ax. This was evidently the "tough push" what Charlie had told us about.

"I see," says Doc. "A big shot, eh?"

"If you mean I've got plenty of influence, you're dead right," drawls Hoghan. "Why, listen, cully, I practically own Torresville. When I want a thing, I get it, and I can make anything happen except rain. And if I take a dislike to a bloke, all sorts of serious accidents and misfortunes befall him."

"All right," comes back Doc. "And now you listen to *me!* Fifteen years ago I could have taken your whole gang for a cleaning. All I'd have needed was a good club and lots of room. But not any more. I've slowed up, and I know it. I don't take any chances." His hand came out of his pocket, and there was his little automatic winking blue and wicked in his big fist. His jaws come together like the springs of a trap. "If any of your gorillas try and play horse with me, I'll tunnel 'em!" he grits, as Hoghan sits back a mite startled. "I'm not fooling. I don't take dirt from anybody, and I'll take my chances of a manslaughter charge."

Hoghan smiles. "I can see I can't bluff you," he says. "Well, no need for us to be enemies. Just business rivals, eh? You try and beat me and I'll try and beat you. Have a drink."

"Sure," agrees Doc.

That's how it was for some days. Every morning they'd meet in the bar to have a drink together and to kid each other how they was getting on. Just one drink, no more; them not wanting Melling to think they was booze hounds. But though they was polite and friendly on the surface you could see they hated each other and was ready to tangle horns at any moment.

Melling, he couldn't seem to make up his mind. After he'd been out with Doc driving over Narrabindi he'd be seeming to come our way, and then the very next day, when Hoghan had had a go at him, it looked like he was inclined to favor Mirralloo. Naturally they both done all they could to get on the right side of Melling, and Hoghan even went as far as to donate twenty pounds to a subscription for some hospital Melling was interested in. Though it was like having all our back teeth pulled, me and Doc decided to raise the ante, and next time Doc seen Melling he asked for the list and put our names down for thirty.

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Melling seemed doubtful about taking the money. Very worried he was, though fuller of gratitude than a blackfeller's dog of fleas.

"Are you sure you can afford all this?" he wants to know. "Good as the cause is, I don't want to take advantage of your generosity, and perhaps—"

"That's all right," says Doc, pulling out the wallet where he kept our roll, and peeling off thirty and stuffing the wad into Melling's hand. "No sacrifice is too great if it helps toward alleviating the suffering of mankind," and he turned away like he couldn't hardly bear to think about it. Me and him both.

BUT even that didn't swing the deal, and Melling was still hovering and dithering. It couldn't go on forever, though, and finally Melling announced he was definitely going to decide one way or another, and he'd meet us and Hoghan and give us his verdict at noon of the next day. That evening, when we was talking to Charlie in the bar, Doc had his great idea.

"Supposing," he says all of a sudden, laying down his glass thoughtful, "supposing, when Melling came down to-morrow to make his decision, he found Hoghan drunk? Completely and shockingly soused?"

Me and Charlie stared. Then light broke upon us.

"Why, that 'ud be a cinch!" I busts out.

"A bonzer ideer!" grunts Charlie. "But 'ow—"

"That's up to you, Charlie," says Doc. "He'll probably have his drink with me to-morrow the same as he usually does. Can you pack a big enough wallop in one drink to do the trick?"

"Let's see," mutters Charlie, scratching his chin, "you and 'im usually 'ave a Tiger Blackshot, don't you? He's a tough soak, 'Oghan, and what 'ud drop most blokes like a shot bullock wouldn't even make his eyes water. It'll need something terrible powerful, and something that looks and tastes like a Blackshot."

"Do your damnedest," Doc tells him. "Your share of the rake-off depends on it."

"Leave it to me," says Charlie.

Next day come. Me, I was nervous. Seemed so many things might happen to gum the works. Maybe Hoghan wouldn't come in for his drink. Maybe he'd suspect something. I moseyed into the bar early on.

It was empty save for Charlie, who winked at me and jerked his thumb toward the little shelf where he did his mixing.

"I suppose it won't kill him?" I asks.

"Well, it ain't no drink for amachoors," says Charlie, "but I don't suppose it'll do 'im any permanent 'arm."

Some time before noon the joint begun to fill up. First Hoghan, then Doc, then some of Hoghan's gang. Doc, whose turn it was to stand the drinks, give Hoghan the high-sign. "Tiger Blackshot as usual, I suppose?"

"Mm, think I'il have a Blue Lightning for a change," says Hoghan.

That was awkward, as a Blue Lightning was a different looking dope altogether. Charlie give Doc a quick look, then shook his head.

"Sorry," he says. "Can't make up a Lightning. I'm dead out of absinthe and short of bitters. 'Ave to be a Blackshot or a Greasy Skids."

"Make it Blackshot then," grunts Hoghan.

Charlie did a bit of bottle shaking

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with his back turned, like always, and slung over a coupla drinks.

"Hello," says Hoghan, as a whistle sounded out in the harbor. "Is that the Sydney boat? Thought she'd have to wait for the tide."

Most of 'em looked out acrosst the veranda to see, Doc among 'em, and in that second Hoghan switched the drinks.

He did it slick and easy. Somehow he had guessed.

"Oh, it's just that Jap pearler shifting anchorage," he says. "Mud in your eye!"

"Skin off your nose!" says Doc, and downed his drink in one gulp.

Me and Charlie had both seen Hoghan's hand slide the glasses round, but we couldn't say nothing without giving the game away, and it all happened so quick that we couldn't think of nothing to stop Doc from making the fatal mistake.

MISTER, maybe you noticed that there often comes a time when things get past and beyond you. When matters got sorta took outa your hands altogether, and there ain't nothing you can do but sit back and let 'er rip. I felt like that then. As it happened, everything come as a complete surprise to all concerned. It just shows you that when you're dealing with a guy like Doc, that had innards that must've been lined with asbestos, you can't be sure of anything.

That drink didn't lay him out. No, sir! He just shook his head, and blinked and coughed a little. Then he took a deep breath and grinned.

"Suffering Catfish!" he gasps, "but that's about the best drink ever!" Then his glance lit on Hoghan, and all of a sudden his manner changed and a mean look come into his eye. "You dirty little rat!" he snarls, and without no warning whatsoever he caught him a open-handed clout on the side of the head that like to have broke his neck, and then plastered him straight on the button with a short right that knocked him colder'n a boarding house supper.

Most everybody was plumb paralyzed by the teetotal unexpectedness of events, but only for a few seconds. Then the "push" begun to gather round very threatening, moving toward Doc. They didn't worry Doc, though. The old hellion squared off against the bar, spat on his hands, let a whoop outa him like a wild Comanche and jumped right in.

Mister, I'm here to tell you that when Doc laid back his ears and really got down to business he was just about the wickedest scrapper I ever knew. I seen him clean out a dive full of Jap sailors in Hakodate once, and there wasn't one of them yeller brethren but didn't think it was the Yokohama earthquake all over again. Of course, he'd collected considerable Anno Domini since then, but that likker of Charlie's seemed to have took plenty years off him and made him quicker and stronger than ever. He used his fists, his head and his feet, promiscuous and simultaneous, and when somebody snatched a bottle from the bar and tried to bean him, he ducked, grabbed a chair, and started in to lay them back-block bozos out in rows.

I can't tell you the details. It wasn't nothing but a blur. Bang, crash, socko! Man, they couldn't even get near him! He was a maniac! And when finally it was all over and the dust had settled, there was the floor of the saloon all cluttered up with bodies that moved a little every now and then, and groaned feebly, whilst Doc stood with a bit of

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broken chair in his hand, spitting out blood and shaking the sweat outa his eyes.

At last, still holding the bit of chair, he stalked out onto the veranda as dignified and triumphant as one of them old Roman warriors. Then he suddenly staggered, a blank look come over him, and he flopped. Yeah, went out like a light!

When me and Charlie bent over him we couldn't find no marks on him but a cut lip and a bruise on the cheek. He was breathing thick and hard.

"It's the drink that's got 'im now," says Charlie.

Well, Doc was only flesh and blood after all, and this here concoction of Charlie's must've had a delayed-action kick.

While we was working on him, who should come along but Melling. "Good gracious, what ever has happened?" he bleats. "What's the matter with him?"

If Melling once suspected the truth, everything would be shot, and I done some quick thinking.

"Sun-stroke," I says. "He went out without his hat and the sun got him. He went mad. Run amok, didn't he, Charlie?"

"Too right," says Charlie. "Lucky 'e didn't kill anybody."

"Poor fellow," mutters Melling, kneeling down beside Doc and feeling his heart. "His heart-beats are normal. If you keep him quiet he'll probably come round soon. A pity. I had some good news for him, too. I was coming to tell you. I've finally decided to purchase Narrabindi."

"You have?" I yelps, hardly daring to believe it.

"Definitely," says Melling. "I have some business to discuss with the manager of the branch bank here first, then I shall be back here with a thousand pounds cash deposit to bind the deal. You can expect me in about an hour. By that time I hope Mr. Sewell will have recovered," and he gets up and trots off toward the bank.

AFTER a bit Doc come to, but he was still very woozy, and it was some time before he could understand how he'd took the wrong drink. The good news about Narrabindi sobered him up wonderful, though.

"Melling must have made up his mind beforehand, so we needn't have troubled about Hoghan," he points out. "And talking of Hoghan, where is he? I'd like to see his face when he hears."

"He ain't in no fit state to stand a shock," I says. "You plastered him *right*. They've took him away."

Them unfortunate gorillas of Hoghan didn't give no more trouble. As fast as they recovered their senses they wandered off muttering and swearing, and they give us plenty of dirty looks as they passed, but that was all. They'd had enough for one day.

We waited a long time for Melling. The Sydney boat come into the harbor and started to unload, and still there wasn't no signs of him. Two hours passed, so I went along to the bank, but it was closed down and the two clerks and the manager was away from their homes when I called. Me and Doc begun to get worried.

"Maybe he's been waylaid and robbed," I says. "He was drawing a thousand in cash, and now I come to think of it I seen one of Hoghan's outfit heading toward the bank. It's a quiet spot, and they could easy have slugged him and dragged him into the bush."

We went up to the bank and looked

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for tracks, but we couldn't find nothing suspicious, and nobody in Torresville seemed to have seen him at all. Just as we got back to the Southern Cross two solid-looking gents come in, new arrivals off the boat.

"Any one name of Melling registered here?" one of 'em asks.

Right away you could see he was a dick.

"Yes," says Charlie, "but he's missing. Funny you should ask. These two blokes"—nodding at us—"have been looking for him."

One dick looked at the other and shrugged.

"Missing, eh? That would be just like him. Hell, just as we think we've got him he gives us the slip!"

"Say, what's the matter?" I pipes up, scared. "What do you want him for?"

"Plenty!" says this bird. "Obtaining money under false pretenses, chiefly. He's the Sydney Snipe, the slickest confidence man south of the Line. There are other minor charges, too. Bag-snatching, pocket-picking and petty larceny."

"But we saw a newspaper cutting about him!" breaks out Doc. "From the Sydney *Herald*. Being thanked by the mayor."

The dick grinned, kinda sour. "A fake," he says. "What did he sting you for?"

"Thirty pounds," husks Doc. "For the North Queensland Native Hospital. My God, what suckers we've been!"

The other dick nodded. "It's usually a fund for providing for widows of seamen lost at sea," he says.

"The only good thing about it is that he's stung Hoghan, too," I says.

Right at that moment a tall, thin guy comes busting into the hotel. He was a pearl-shell trader, one of the richest fellers in the Gulf, and he was in a terrible state because some one had stole his power launch. Whoever had stole it had been seen heading outa the harbor at top speed over an hour before.

Naturally it didn't take no detective to dope out that the thief was Melling, alias the Sydney Snipe.

The dicks and the trader and nearly everybody in the bar left in great excitement and headed for the harbor, though what they figured they was gonna do was beyond us. Me and Doc stayed. Seeing that the power launch was the fastest craft on the coast, and nobody could tell for sure where the Snipe would make for, the chances of catching him was comparatively minus. Me and Doc was too full of feelings to say much.

Finally Doc says: "Charlie, there's only one thing left. Fix us one of your specials. Something to make us forget." He felt in his pocket to pay for the drinks, and his face went green. "My wallet!" he breathes. "It's gone!"

Like a flash I remembered how Melling had felt Doc's heart. "He's took it!" I yelps. "When you was recuperating a little while back. Gosh almighty, Doc, we're ruined! That was our whole wad. We ain't even got carfare!"

Charlie slid over two glasses. "The drinks are on me," he says. "As many as you like. You done me a favor. It was through you I invented that there cocktail. The best I ever mixed, my oath! Yes, and it was through you I thought up a bonzer name for it, too."

"Yeah?" I moans, grabbing the glass. "What is it?"

"Sun-stroke," says Charlie. "Drink hearty."

THE END.

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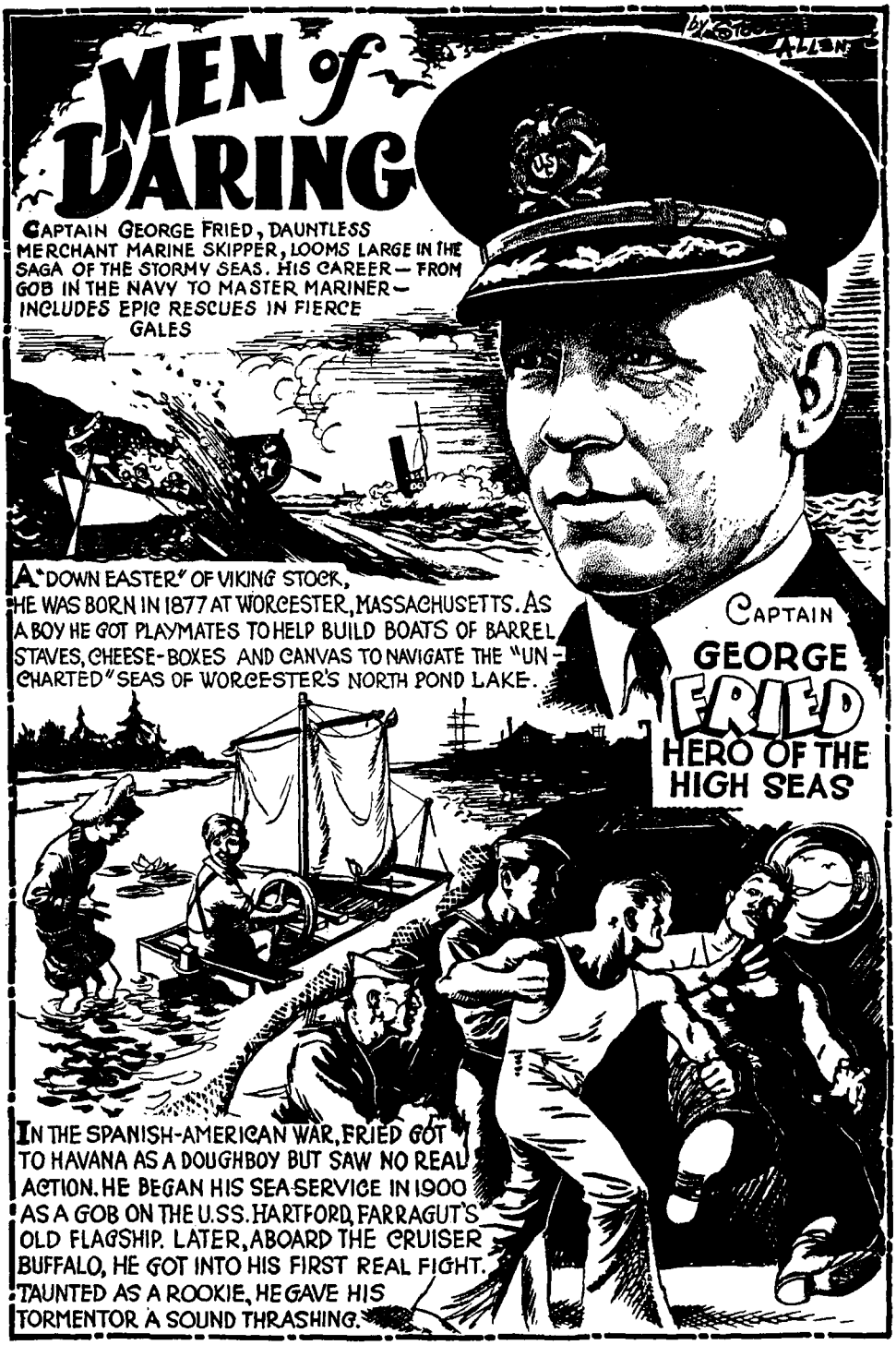
MEN of DARING
CAPTAIN GEORGE FRIED, DAUNTLESS MERCHANT MARINE SKIPPER, LOOMS LARGE IN THE SAGA OF THE STORMY SEAS. HIS CAREER — FROM GOB IN THE NAVY TO MASTER MARINER — INCLUDES EPIC RESCUES IN FIERCE GALES
A "DOWN EASTER" OF VIKING STOCK, HE WAS BORN IN 1877 AT WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS. AS A BOY HE GOT PLAYMATES TO HELP BUILD BOATS OF BARREL STAVES, CHEESE-BOXES AND CANVAS TO NAVIGATE THE "UNCHARTED" SEAS OF WORCESTER'S NORTH POND LAKE.
CAPTAIN GEORGE FRIED HERO OF THE HIGH SEAS
IN THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR, FRIED GOT TO HAVANA AS A DOUGHBOY BUT SAW NO REAL ACTION. HE BEGAN HIS SEA-SERVICE IN 1900 AS A GOB ON THE U.S.S. HARTFORD, FARRAGUT'S OLD FLAGSHIP. LATER, ABOARD THE CRUISER BUFFALO, HE GOT INTO HIS FIRST REAL FIGHT. TAUNTED AS A ROOKIE, HE GAVE HIS TORMENTOR A SOUND THRASHING.

Next Week: Gen. Lee Christmas, Heroic Villain

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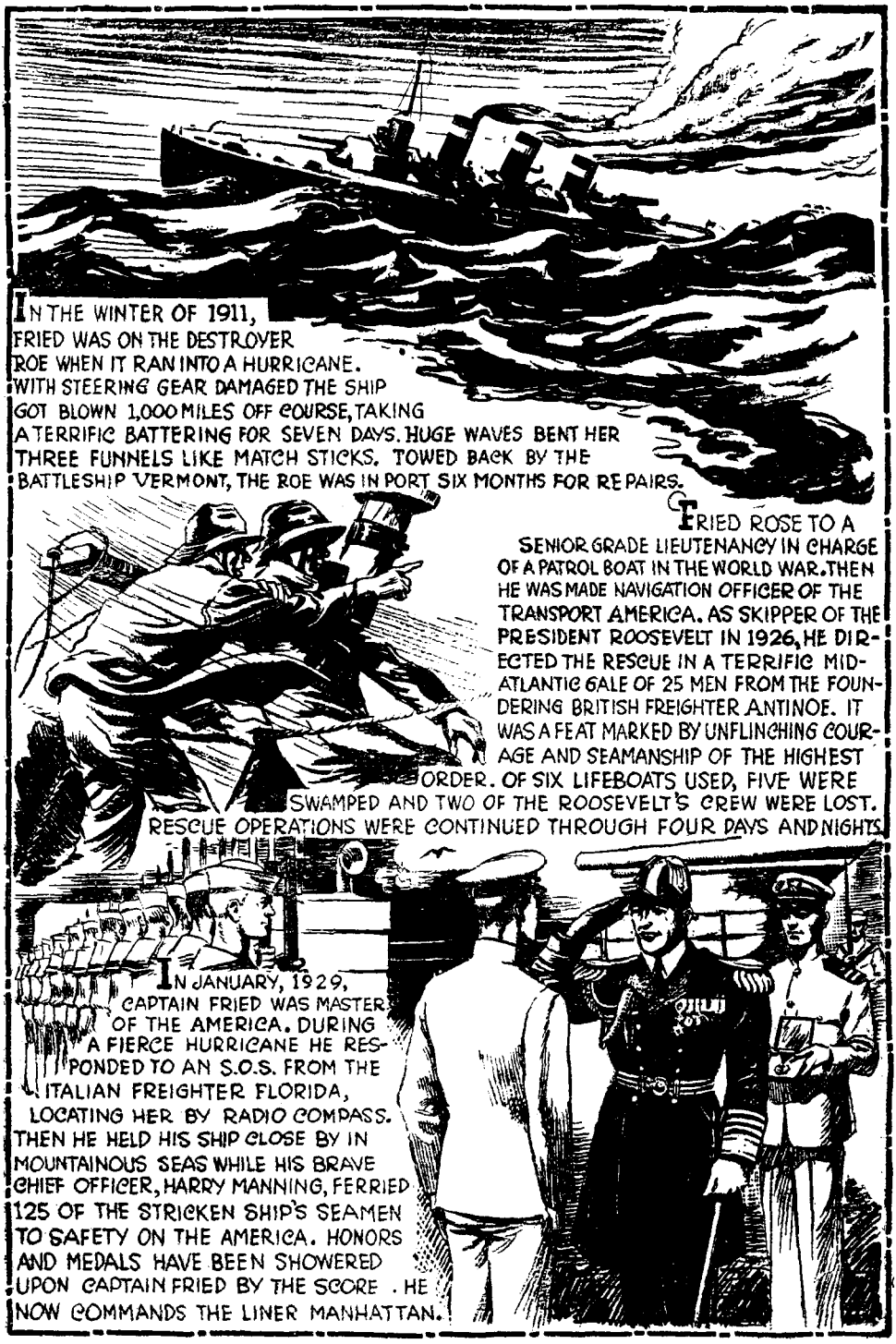
IN THE WINTER OF 1911, FRIED WAS ON THE DESTROYER ROE WHEN IT RAN INTO A HURRICANE. WITH STEERING GEAR DAMAGED THE SHIP GOT BLOWN 1,000 MILES OFF COURSE, TAKING A TERRIFIC BATTERING FOR SEVEN DAYS. HUGE WAVES BENT HER THREE FUNNELS LIKE MATCH STICKS. TOWED BACK BY THE BATTLESHIP VERMONT, THE ROE WAS IN PORT SIX MONTHS FOR REPAIRS.
FRIED ROSE TO A SENIOR GRADE LIEUTENANCY IN CHARGE OF A PATROL BOAT IN THE WORLD WAR. THEN HE WAS MADE NAVIGATION OFFICER OF THE TRANSPORT AMERICA. AS SKIPPER OF THE PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT IN 1926, HE DIRECTED THE RESCUE IN A TERRIFIC MID-ATLANTIC GALE OF 25 MEN FROM THE FOUNDERING BRITISH FREIGHTER ANTINOE. IT WAS A FEAT MARKED BY UNFLINCHING COURAGE AND SEAMANSHIP OF THE HIGHEST ORDER. OF SIX LIFEBOATS USED, FIVE WERE SWAMPED AND TWO OF THE ROOSEVELT'S CREW WERE LOST. RESCUE OPERATIONS WERE CONTINUED THROUGH FOUR DAYS AND NIGHTS.
IN JANUARY, 1929, CAPTAIN FRIED WAS MASTER OF THE AMERICA. DURING A FIERCE HURRICANE HE RESPONDED TO AN S.O.S. FROM THE ITALIAN FREIGHTER FLORIDA, LOCATING HER BY RADIO COMPASS. THEN HE HELD HIS SHIP CLOSE BY IN MOUNTAINOUS SEAS WHILE HIS BRAVE CHIEF OFFICER, HARRY MANNING, FERRIED 125 OF THE STRICKEN SHIP'S SEAMEN TO SAFETY ON THE AMERICA. HONORS AND MEDALS HAVE BEEN SHOWERED UPON CAPTAIN FRIED BY THE SCORE. HE NOW COMMANDS THE LINER MANHATTAN.

Also, Women of Daring: Mabel Strickland, Queen of the Saddle

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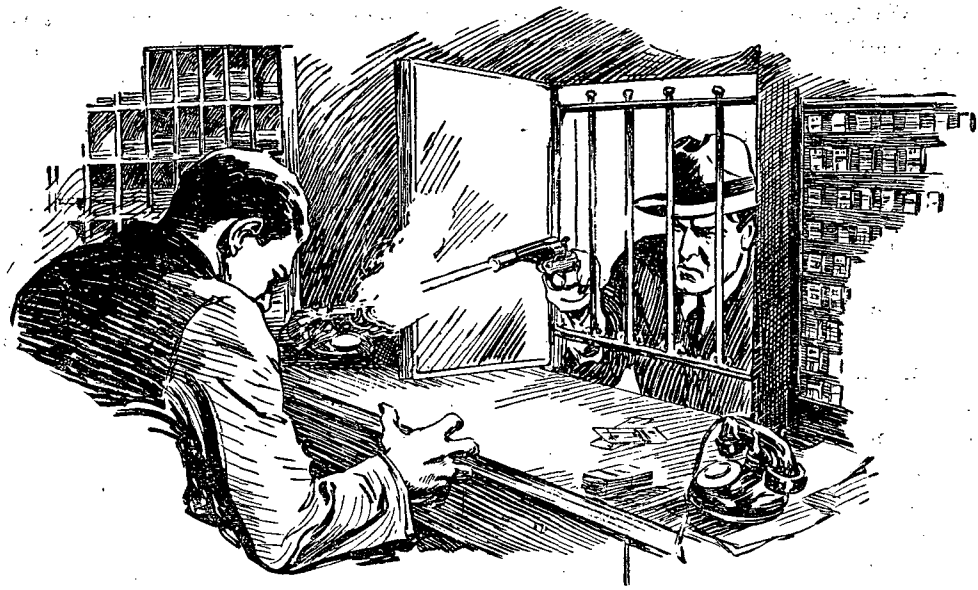

It was going exactly as he had planned

Superstition's the Bunk

By CHARLES VICTOR KNOX

"Nothing's unlucky except carelessness," was the motto of Wolf McGowan, slickest of crooks

MOST crooks are superstitious, but Wolf McGowan wasn't one of them. He scoffed equally at black cats, broken mirrors, ladders, and Friday the thirteenth. In fact, he seized upon every opportunity to prove how innocuous such things really were.

He was running true to form, therefore, when he chose that particular Friday the thirteenth for the rubbing out of Marty Tremaine. The idea gave Jerry Bolton, who was Wolf McGowan's most trusted henchman, the jitters.

Jerry's long and faithful service gave him the privilege of speaking his mind to Wolf.

"Jeeze!" he whined as he stood staring moodily out over the broad expanse of Lake Erie, from the window of a Cleveland hotel room. "It's unlucky as hell, Wolf, I'm tellin' you!"

"Nuts!" said Wolf, who was sitting in a chair toying with a half tumbler of straight rye.

Wolf wasn't a man you'd remember afterwards, if you saw him in a crowd. He was inconspicuous, like some middle-aged clerk. Perhaps, if you had occasion to notice him particularly, you might remember a little cicatrix on the left side of his mouth which slanted the lips a bit, or that his thin nose was slightly twisted, his eyes hard and penetrating; but your casual glance would pass over him without stopping long. He always counted on that.

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"You've been plannin' this job for six months; an' then, of all days, you hadda go an' pick this one," Bolton complained.

"Nuts!" said Wolf, sipping his rye as he looked at his watch.

"I tell you it's unlucky!"

"Sure," nodded Wolf. "Unlucky for Marty."

"You're dumb."

"Come on. It's time we started."

He finished off the rye and got up. Jerry followed him out of the room.

"Nothing's unlucky except carelessness," McGowan said as they walked toward the elevator.

For some moments after leaving the hotel they sauntered deviously; and finally they slipped unobserved into a dark sedan, parked with its engine running. Instantly the car was off, headed for Chicago. The run would take eight hours, Wolf figured. That would bring him into the Loop just at the rush hour, which was what he wanted.

Flying along the concrete, he reviewed in his mind every step of his plan of action. For an ordinary job of this kind, he would merely have detailed one of his men. This was, however, not business; it was just a long-delayed private settlement between him and a one-time partner. Only personal attention would suffice, therefore.

The car would drive north on Clark Street, and at the corner of Randolph he would step out. Then he would walk east, until he passed the theater where Tremaine, gone straight these ten years, was working as a box-office man, handling the desultory advance ticket sale for the play called "Behind the Door." At that hour, Marty would be alone behind the wicket and no attendants would be in the lobby. Wolf would walk right in, halt for a moment in a shadowy corner which Bolton had described, until he was sure the coast was clear; then he would step up to the window, which was not visible from the street.

With his head bowed so that Tremaine would not recognize him, Wolf would fumble in his breast pocket as if for his wallet. When he looked up, he would have in his gloved hand a stubby pistol equipped with a silencer. He would give Tremaine half a second to realize that he had come to carry out his threat, then he would fire. Since it would be impossible to trace the pistol, he would leave it on the shelf and walk out, mingling with the unsuspecting crowd.

Norwalk, Fremont, Angola, Elkhart and one or two smaller villages flashed by as he checked and rechecked his plan, detail by detail, and found it flawless. South Bend, Michigan City, Gary and East Chicago faded behind.

COMING up the south shore drive in Chicago, Bolton roused himself and whined irritably.

"I wish you wouldn't, chief. Friday the thirteenth! I tell you it's unlucky as hell!"

"You're a fool," Wolf said.

"You'll see!"

Nobody paid any attention as Wolf got out of the sedan at Randolph Street and slammed the door behind him. And not a single untoward incident marred the perfect execution of the job. Everything went off exactly as he had planned it.

McGowan smiled grimly as he slipped out of the theater and continued east.

"Superstition," he muttered to himself, "is the bunk!"

He almost wished a black cat would cross his path as additional proof. He was sorry he didn't have a mirror to

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break. Hopefully he looked over his left shoulder, but there was no moon.

Then he saw, right ahead of him, a ladder leaning against the side of a building. He smiled again, as he deviated slightly from the flow of pedestrians, in order to pass beneath it.

A few steps farther on, the sedan drew up to the curb, and Wolf climbed in. Wolf found Jerry in a cold sweat.

"You idiot!" Jerry hissed. "I seen you walk under that ladder!—Don't you know that's the worst kinda bad luck?"

"Nuts!" said Wolf. "Superstition's the bunk!"

"You think so?"

"Yeah."

"You'll see!"

"You're a fool!" said Wolf. "Nothing's unlucky except carelessness."

Some eight hours later, McGowan, unruffled by his journey, got out of the car on a dark Cleveland side street, walked to an all-night restaurant, and as he drank coffee leisurely read the early editions of the morning papers. The Tremaine murder in Chicago commanded half a column. Attempted robbery was the police theory, it appeared.

Wolf went to bed satisfied.

Saturday's Chicago papers, however, contained big pictures of "Wolf McGowan, Former Associate of Murdered Man"; and Wolf, up in his rooms perused them with a frown.

"The dicks are getting too smart," he commented briefly.

"You *would* do a job on Friday the thirteenth, an' then walk under a ladder!" scowled Bolton.

"You're a fool!" said Wolf. "And besides, they can't hang it on me.—Nobody can prove I was in Chi that day."

His presence in Cleveland, however, was well known to the police, and that evening a delegation called, at the request of the Chicago police, to invite him down to headquarters for a chat. He denied knowing anything about the murder. He hadn't been in Chicago for three years, he declared. Yes, he had known Tremaine a long time ago, but he had completely lost track of him. Yes, he had been in Cleveland all day Friday. And that was that.

But the next day the delegation returned to his hotel, and solemnly arrested him for the murder of Marty Tremaine, lodging him in jail, pending extradition proceedings.

It seemed that a man by the name of Jasper had seen McGowan's picture in the paper, and had recognized him as a man he had noticed on Randolph Street, a few minutes after the approximate time of the killing.

"Are you sure?" the commissioner asked Jasper after Jasper had told his story.

"Sure."

"How could you identify him?"

"He had a little scar on the left side of his mouth, and his nose was twisted. Funny eyes, too.—I'd know him again if I saw him."

"Wasn't there a crowd on the street at the time?"

"Yes, a big crowd."

"Perhaps you just think you saw him?" said the commissioner. "Tell me," he continued, "just why you happened to notice this particular man in the crowd."

"Well," said Jasper, "you see, there was a ladder leaning against a building, and I noticed that he was the only person who walked under it. So I took a good look at him. I'm that way too—I figure that superstition's the bunk."

THE END

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"Men who could do this are not even beasts!" said the buccaneer

The Naked Blade

By GEORGE CHALLIS

"Pieces-of-eight are what we want, Captain Morgan; not Porto Bello's dead men!" said Ivor Kildare—but he had a secret purpose

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

WHEN Ivor Kildare, Englishman, returned to that rich town on the Spanish Main, Porto Bello, it was in the company of the greatest of buccaneers, none other than the great English pirate, Captain Henry Morgan. And with them was Kildare's bitterest enemy, Captain Tranquillo, whom Kildare had dared to insult and to taunt, but who temporarily agreed to forget his grudge, at the curt order of Captain Morgan.

Kildare had been in the town of Porto Bello once before—as a prisoner. And when he succeeded in escaping, it was to promise himself that one day he would return, with the hope of taking from the place the fairest of ladies, Ines Heredia. For her guardian, Señor Larreta, had promised her hand — for a fat fee, of course — to a yellow-haired Spaniard named Pedro Alvarado. It was with Alvarado's ship, in fact, and by means of the rich stores it had contained when Kildare seized it at Jamaica, that Kildare had been able to persuade Morgan to join him on this attempt to storm the town of Porto Bello. But Kildare's one

This story began in the Argosy for February 10.

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coveted prize was his fair love.—That was what made it the more ridiculous that, upon one previous occasion, Kildare should have spared the life of her fiancé — merely because the man was clearly a gentleman—when the fellow might have been killed and thus prevented from returning to his intended bride.

And so it was that Kildare and his faithful Indian companion, Luis, now stood outside the windows of Señor Larreta's great house and looked in upon the company gathered within. In addition to the host, he saw Ines Heredia herself, and—Kildare frowned when he saw that—Pedro Alvarado, who had somehow returned.

While Captain Morgan and his crew waited in the rain, down the coast, Kildare and Luis had come into the town to reconnoiter—possibly to take a single captive from whom they might gain information. But Kildare had not been able to resist going to the house of his lady, hoping for a glimpse of her.

CHAPTER XX.

A PROMISE TO RETURN.

IT was too damp for the others. They were afraid to wet their fine boots on the sanded paths of the little garden.

"She will come out by herself," whispered Kildare to Luis, the profound conviction behind that thought making it audible.

And the moment he had spoken, he heard her urging them to go inside; that she would be with them instantly. She wanted only one breath of the open air.

They retired, and the girl came straight on to the edge of the central pool of the patio. In it appeared the image of the stormy confusion in the sky above, and the moon that plunged through it. Kildare slid behind the shrubbery until he stood between her and the door which she had just left.

"A gentleman!" said the girl, under her breath.

"Well," said Kildare, half audibly, "no one can believe more than the strength of the heart permits."

She whirled about. He saw the scream frozen in her face, but not a sound came from her straining lips.

"You *have* come again! Pedro swore that you would, but how could I believe it?" she gasped. "Stand out of the light and within the shadow. There—that's better!"

"I thought you would call for help; and instead of that, you're helping me," said Kildare.

"You saved Pedro," said the girl. "Hush! We can't talk. If even the stones of those walls recognized your voice, Ivor Kildare, they would fall upon us and crush us.—Go, quickly! Even if you were no more than a shadow on the ground, you would be in danger here!"

"Then ask me first why I have come," suggested Kildare.

"I can't ask that. You'll say that you've come because of me."

"You're afraid of me," said Kildare.

He went a little closer.

"I even think that you hate me," he added.

"Whenever I see you," said the girl, "my body shudders to think of all the wounds that you've given to Spaniards. I know that you are brave, and that you have some wild, romantic feeling about me. But every time I see you, I feel the shame of the Spaniards whom you have beaten. My whole soul feels it—and all the Spanish blood in my veins."

"And what does your English blood feel?" asked Kildare.

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"Nothing!" she answered. "The blood of an honest person is all that of the country that has given that person a name."

"Nevertheless," said Kildare, "you are going to leave Porto Bello with me, whether you wish it or not."

"Do you mean that you would try to force me away?" she asked, seemingly more amazed than frightened.

"Not now," answered Kildare. "I only offer you this chance of going quietly and peacefully away with me because if you refuse such hell will pour on this house that one minute will rot it away as if it had suffered the ravages of a million years. Come with me now, Ines; for if you don't I'll have to go away and return. And when I return—I can't explain the rest."

"If you return, you'll be destroyed," said the girl. "Pedro Alvarado is now under our roof!"

"If there were a Pedro Alvarado in every door and in every hall of your house, still they could not keep me from reaching you," said Kildare.

"THAT is a cheap boast," said Ines Heredia. "I know you are brave enough, but you are no god of thunder and lightning, *señor*."

"This Alvarado—this pretty, yellow-haired boy.—Do you love him?"

"In the name of heaven, Señor Kildare," said the girl, "why do you ask me such a question? And why do you expect me to answer it?"

"Because I have a claim on you," said Kildare.

"What earthly claim?" she asked.

"The blood of all the men I have killed or led to death on account of you," said Kildare. "Is that a claim?"

"Do you put your murders upon me, Captain Kildare?" said the girl.

"And by the cold look on your shallow, pretty, silly face," said Kildare, "I know that more men will have to die. And there's the pity of it! There's where I know that I am a fool. Except for your face, you're not a whit better than a million other women.—No, not so honest or kind or gentle. But the pain in my heart leads me like a bull with a ring in its nose. I've asked you a question, and I want an answer to it. Do you love this boy—this blue-eyed, yellow-headed boy—this Pedro Alvarado?"

"Yes," she said. "I love him! Or I'm beginning to love him. And every word you speak makes me love him the more. Poor, noble, generous-hearted Pedro. He calls you a gentleman, in spite of all your murdered men!"

"If every sin of mine were a small stone, and they were heaped together," said Kildare, "the pile would reach higher than the mainmast of a great ship. But I swear that none of my sins is as great as my folly in loving a half-Spanish wench who hasn't eye enough to tell a man from a boy.—This guardian of yours—this honorable man of business—this other good Spaniard, called Larreta.—How does he feel, now that the first marriage payment has been cancelled? Will he let you marry Pedro Alvarado, or first must Alvarado find more money?"

"I have given you enough answers," said the girl. "And whatever Señor Larreta may be, he is far too high and great a man to be handled by the tongue of an upstart English buccaneer!"

Kildare stared at her for a moment.

"It's the Spanish in you that makes you talk in this manner," he said. "But think back, now, to the honest English that put the blue stain in your eyes and the fair color in your hair. Let

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that blood speak out in you, and it will tell you that I deserve an answer. If you're a woman—and a good woman—my sins are nothing to you, compared with the fact that I love you. Answer me—will Larreta let the marriage go forward without more money?"

He had to wait a moment before the answer forced its way through her lips.

"No," she said at last.

"Very well," said Kildare. "Then I still have a little time. I'm going away, but when I come again I'll ask no questions. Either I'll take you away with me, like a horse on a rope, or else I'll die before Larreta's house."

SHE ran suddenly past him toward the house, her head thrown back.

He half expected to hear her voice ring out to give the alarm; then she paused, and went on more slowly until the shadows of the doorway drowned first the colors of her dress, and then the flash of her jewels. And she was gone.

Kildare went from the patio, with Luis again at his shoulder. The rain had begun again; their feet sloshed through the mud.

"Speak to me, Luis," said Kildare. "Tell me the first thing that is in your mind?"

"I think of how many words a white man uses," said the Indian. "And that is a wonder to me. An Indian girl, master, if she saw that her lover had come to see her in the enemy's camp—she would not need to hear him speak. She would understand quickly."

"True," said Kildare. "And I shall learn more of the Indian style of wooing, before long. There is such iron in my heart, Luis, that it would turn the point of a sword!"

The rain, which made the world miserable, gave them both safety. A column of soldiers came crunching through the slush, fifty of them in double file. They marched with grunts and curses, and the rain blinded them to any thought of danger that might lurk in the form of two such passers-by as Kildare and Luis. They went on with their heads down, and Kildare smiled a little. He felt that Porto Bello, suddenly, had been delivered over into the hands of ruin, and he felt that ruin was all it deserved.

Even had they never been in jail, they would have known the place by the sounds that came pouring out of it. Madhouse or prison, nothing but a house of torment could have produced such a chorus of outcries as accompanied one overmastering solo of terror and pain—a woman's voice, screaming.

"Listen, Luis," said Kildare.

He touched Luis, and made him still.

"But I hear," answered Luis, "and ever since I was held in that place I have dreamed and thought of nothing else. And the shrieking of a woman has always been echoing somewhere in my ear—very far off. That is Jailer Capote at work. He likes to flog the women, and I can tell that it is Capote who is doing so now."

"Listen to her beg," said Kildare, as they drew nearer. "To hear a thing like that is to ripen the brain of a man, Luis! All in an instant, I know that God put me on earth for one important service—to kill Juan Capote!"

They stood close beside the wall of the long shed, and listened to the woman, yelling out in one unceasing sound of agony. They heard the crackling of the whip on the bare flesh; the cursing of the other prisoners. They could not make out Capote's voice until the flogging had ceased and the voice of the woman had

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run down the scale to a helpless, hopeless sobbing. Then they could hear Capote gasping out:

"And the next time—twice as many strokes!—And the next time, I beat the child, too. It wants water, does it? You have to wake me up from a good sleep, because your dirty brat wants water? I'll give it blood! That's what I'll give it! I'll give it its own blood to drink.—You want to know why I beat you, and I'll tell you why. I beat you because it pleases me to beat you, damn you! I like to see you jump, and I love to hear you screech.—And there's one more lash to prove it!"

THE whip cracked again. The woman's answering scream was a white thrust of lightning through Kildare's brain.

The whole shed broke into a furious uproar then. Kildare could hear Juan Capote progressing toward the door of the shed, slashing those helplessly protesting wretches with his whiplash.

On either side of the rear door, Kildare and Luis waited. The door opened. Juan Capote came out, staggering with labor, but great and full of himself. He struck a last stroke in his battle, delivering a good whack on the muddy face of the earth. He was drunk with power and the pain that he had given.

But before he could move, he was paralyzed by those terrible hands of Luis, as swiftly as the sting of the wasp paralyzes the strength of a fat spider. Kildare said:

"Do you know me, Capote?"

"Oh God!—Serene Father!" said Juan Capote. "What have I done that the devil himself should be sent for me? Señor Kildare—Captain Tranquillo — have mercy.—Poor Juan Capote does no harm—"

"Beast!" said Kildare. "We have been hearing the woman scream! Come quietly, or you know what we will do."

So Juan Capote came quietly, through the length of the town; past the rain-dimmed walls and the rain-splintered lights of the fort; into the dark of the coast road, beyond. Before he had gone far shadows stirred, rising out of the earth.

"We have the prisoner from the town," said Kildare. "Where is Captain Morgan?"

At once they were guided to where Morgan sat sheltered from the rain, under a tree in the dark of the woods, with no light and no comfort except a weltering handful of fire that burned on the ground. The green-faced ape hovered over this fire, cherishing its warmth with his hands. And in the darkness and the wet of the night, all around stood the rest of the captains. Kildare merely said:

"I have been gone a long time, because I wanted to get the best man. This is Juan Capote, the jailer, who knows the name of every soldier in Porto Bello; exactly where they are stationed; how many guns are in the forts; and how many rounds of powder for 'em. Question him closely. Only make sure that he is not lying, because he's the greatest liar in the world.—Turn his face from the fort, too, because his screaming will carry farther than the beacon of a lighthouse."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE STORMING.

THE rain stopped before the gray of the morning, coming coldly over the forest and the hills. The light showed Juan Capote hanging like a scarecrow—a stuffed, dismembered thing, against the trunk of a tree. They

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had taken from him all that they wished. They had made sure that it was the truth, by closely winnowing his words, and his body with pain.

Kildare cut him loose. He fell heavily into the mud at the foot of the tree. And Kildare said:

"Even I am sorry, Juan. Not so much for you, but because, as you see, there are in the world men who are even greater devils than yourself!"

Juan Capote said nothing. His glazed eyes looked before him without sight.

"Shall we kill him, Luis?" asked Kildare.

But the speechless Juan Capote made a sudden gesture with both hands. Nothing could save his life, but nothing could diminish his love of life, even if every breath of it were assured torment. So he made that dumb appeal for mercy, and Kildare turned away from him, sick at heart.

"Men could do this, Luis—" he gasped. "They are not men—and they are not even beasts!"

"Why?" said Luis. "To Juan Capote I could have done all those things, and with pleasure. I could have done some other things, too, because, I had a few ideas of my own. But on the whole, I thought that the torturers were doing very well. At least, they made sure that he did not lie!"

They drew near the fort, taking shelter everywhere, training their muskets on the embrasures and on the few sentinels that walked the walls.

The light increased. Kildare, turning suddenly, was aware that Captain Tranquillo stood behind him, smiling with infinite confidence and good humor.

"What are you thinking of, Tranquillo, poor fellow?" said Kildare.

"I was just thinking of that Juan Capote," said Tranquillo. "Of nothing but Capote, on my word."

He kept on smiling, and Kildare knew very well what was in the mind of the buccaneer.

"The fort ahoy! The fort ahoy!" shouted the great, familiar voice of Captain Henry Morgan. "We have you ringed around. Surrender, Spaniards, and your lives are saved. But if you fight me and make me lose time, I'll slaughter you all. I'll fill the walls of the fort with red soup!—Cheer, lads!"

A shout ran down the line of men which lay sprawled among the trees, all around the place, just to show those inside the walls that the danger completely surrounded the commander. But that commandant was a brave fellow, and Kildare could make out the frantic voice within the walls that ordered the trumpets blown and a drum beaten.

Straightway, two small cannons roared from the top of the wall, sending their shot foolishly far and high. There followed a scattering of musket fire; not much, but enough at least to alarm the town, which Henry Morgan had hoped to catch sleeping. He and all the buccaneers, in a rage, were instantly over the walls. The fighting ended before it was well begun, and Captain Henry Morgan, hearkening to the distant sounds of distress that came plainly to his ears from the awakening town, swore by all that was holy that he would live up to his promise and slaughter the Spaniards out of hand.

KILDARE took him by the arm. The ape, Jimmy Green, straightway ran up his master's back and, sitting on Morgan's shoulder, cupped

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a hand behind his ear to listen to the conversation with utter gravity and a judicious air.

Said Kildare, "Pieces-of-eight are what we want, Captain Morgan, and not the dead men of Porto Bello."

The bull brow of Morgan was swollen and flushed.

His whole face was slightly enlarged and distorted by the rush of blood into the arteries.

"I've marked your pretty ways and your fine thinking, Master Kildare—or Tranquillo—or whatever your name may be," shouted Morgan, "but I tell you that I've promised the death of these dirty rats to God Almighty, and therefore they shall die."

Already, the poor Spaniards had been herded into a single big room, the mess quarters of the common soldiers; and now the real Captain Tranquillo appeared with a pannier in his hand, from which he was permitting a steady stream of blow gunpowder to drool.

"The cellar," he cried, "was filled with barrels of the powder—It would be better than eating and drinking to put the burning match of a musket to this powder train, and let the fort and all the men in it go jump at the sky."

"Do you hear a true buccaneer—a jolly heart and a right companion talking?" exclaimed Henry Morgan to Kildare; and, turning to Tranquillo, "This fellow, Tranquillo, would let them off."

"A wise man looks to his own skin first," said Tranquillo.

Kildare walked out of the fort with Luis, saying nothing, but thinking all the more. There was no outward reason for this change on the part of Morgan. In fact, this very night, Kildare had performed an important act of service. Nevertheless, he saw very clearly that Tranquillo stood too close to the throne of power to allow Kildare any space whatever.

That instant, had he been thinking of his own safety alone, Kildare would have fled from the town.

The whole troop of the buccaneers now cleared out from the fort. The last man of all was Tranquillo, running wildly through the gate. Behind him the earth opened, and with a great roar, in a torrent of red fire, the first fort of Porto Bello was flung at the clouds.

That uproar was a fitting beginning for the attack on Porto Bello. The echoes of the explosion died away among the hills; another human echo of the crash came in the upraised voice from the streets of the frightened town. Then the downfalling masonry which had been hurled into the air began to strike the earth, beating down trees and killing more than one of the buccaneers.

Other damage began to happen to them at once. The sun was not yet up; but the daylight was rapidly increasing, and now Castle Gloria, which shielded Porto Bello on one side, opened fire with both heavy guns and small. Morgan, ordering the men forward to this necessary attack, was in a towering passion. Kildare saw him kick aside the green-faced ape and rush forward, shouting orders. Coming up with Ivor Kildare, the pirate thundered:

"What devilishness is in the hearts of those Spaniards now? They should be running for their lives; and instead of that they're murdering us with the big guns."

"It's the governor," said Kildare. "He has the look of a man who'll keep them fighting till the finish."

"I'll feed that governor to the crows—a spoonful at a time, from

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my thumb and forefinger!" shouted Morgan, and ran forward.

THE monkey, unwilling to scramble on foot, caught up with its master and leaped to his back. Morgan shook it off impatiently. Again it leaped up from the side, and Kildare saw Henry Morgan lift his fist to crush the ape to the ground, and then suspend the blow. Instead, he ran patiently on, carrying that living burden!

That seemed to Kildare the strangest sight that he ever had seen in the world, considering what he knew of Henry Morgan's nature.

There was no concerted work. The pirates simply found shelter wherever they could; in the hollows of the ground or behind brush, in groups of twos and threes, or singly. They kept up a musket fire on the fort. When the Spaniards sponged and rammed home the charges in their guns they had to expose themselves at the embrasures, and the buccaneers were the finest marksmen in the world. So many a gunner was killed, but the buccaneers themselves were ruinously swept by the steady fire of the big guns.

Almost worse than the death that continually came amongst them was the heat of the sun. To escape that, now and again, a party would rush the fort, yelling wildly, which would bring on a certain quantity of the other buccaneers to help them in the assault. They prepared fire-pots of resin and powder to burn the gates; but always, when they came near, their narrow scaling ladders were thrust away from the walls, and down upon those beneath came a shower of stones, of earthen pots filled with powder, or shells crammed with small shot that exploded and killed all who were near.

Kildare, crouched beside Luis behind some small shrubs, and making play with a pair of muskets, was addressed from behind, and he saw Henry Morgan on one knee behind him. Jimmy Green was still on the buccaneer's shoulder, ducking his wise head every time a cannon boomed.

"What is it, Kildare?" said Morgan. "What does *your* brain say to it?"

"Better ask Tranquillo, first," suggested Kildare.

"Tranquillo is only a damned Italian!" said Morgan. "Besides, he's not as near me as you think. Just because I drink with a man is no sign that I love his judgment. But you have a cold, clear brain in your head, Kildare.—What would you say?—Tranquillo swears that we're beaten. But once we start to retreat those Spaniards will be out of their walls in no time, and they will cut us to pieces."

"Send a flag of truce," said Kildare, "and tell the governor that he's a fool to keep on resisting, when we already have him in our hands. Offer him terms to surrender."

"He's a brave man.—Besides, he won't believe us," said Morgan.

"WHILE he's answering," said Kildare, "our fellows will have a breathing spell. And your summoning those in the city to surrender will make them feel weaker and make our men feel stronger. Besides, it will give us a chance to think. And thought pulls down stone walls faster than can be done with cannon."

"Time," said Morgan, "might help us a little, now. We can make some broader scaling ladders, for one thing three or four abreast. Such ladders—ladders that the men can mount three or four abreast. Such ladders won't so easily be knocked away from the walls. Kildare, get together some

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men and start the making of those ladders. I'll send in the letter offering terms immediately.—The devil's in that governor! The fort should have been ours long ago."

He was off, at once; and as Kildare gathered groups of men, here and there, for the building of broader ladders out of canes and brushwood, the firing of the guns stopped. The buccaneers set up a cheer; and then it was seen that the flag of truce was going forward. A time of silence followed.

There were many dead, and Dutch Peter, the "surgeon," was among those. Kildare saw his fat, round face, in death smiling more placidly than ever, with a little round hole drilled cleanly between the eyes. Pierre Chaptal, dry-eyed, sat cross-legged behind him, holding the dead man's hand.

"Well, Chaptal," said Kildare, surprised at this show of emotion in the old buccaneer, "all that will do him no good now—poor Dutch Peter!"

"You see how it is," said Pierre Chaptal, with his usual gravity. "I've sometimes thought that when I am on the way to hell, captain, I should like to have some one keep hold on my hand until the warmth drips out of it and the cold comes in. A stirrup cup is a heartening thing, and so is a friend's farewell, captain. Dutch Peter was not a thrifty man. But he was a friend!"

An outcry of cheering came from the fort. Inside, Kildare knew, Morgan's offer had been refused.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE NOISE OF TRIUMPH.

THERE were many ladders prepared now, and others nearing completion. Morgan appeared once more, the ape running on all fours beside him, and now and then half straightening up, to use a stick of wood as a cane.

"The governor tells us to go to the devil," said Morgan, "and says he'll never surrender himself alive. The Spaniards are making everything ready for a final effort. And the one bit of good in the whole thing is that our boys are picking up their heads again. They've had an hour or so out of the sun, and just at present their brains are not boiling."

"They haven't opened fire from the fort," said Kildare.

"They're saving up for a volley that they'll use when we try to rush the fort," said Morgan. "And God help the lads then.—Hurry the ladders on. I'll fire three shots in the air, as the signal for the rush. Get your section of men ready. And if we win through to Porto Bello, captain, you've had a larger share than any other man!"

While Morgan was speaking in this friendly way, the monkey took hold of Kildare's sleeve and twitched it, all the while nodding and muttering with the greatest goodwill in the world. Then off went the strange pair. But Kildare, looking after them, felt that there was more honest sincerity in the beast than in the man.

Then came, with surprising suddenness, the signal for the final rush. The ladders had been distributed to various quarters around the fort; they were picked up by the buccaneers and brought out of cover with a rush, toward the walls.

Yet not a gun spoke from Gloria Castle!

Kildare could see the shadowy forms moving about inside the embrasures, but there was not a round of shot fired until the rush of the pirates had brought them very close. Then one

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piece exploded—a signal. A storm of heavy shot and bullets whipped through the crowd of English then. The Spaniards cheered madly; the buccaneers yelled like wounded beasts. Several of the ladders were dropped, and the carriers, insane for battle, ran ahead to find themselves helpless beneath the walls, where stones and hand grenades blew them to pieces. Many more ladders, however, were set against the walls, and instantly were weighted down with a mass of climbing pirates.

Luis and old Pierre Chaptal were both on Kildare's ladder. At his side they went rapidly up the rungs.

On the walls, men were striving with long poles to push the ladder off, so that it would topple backwards and crush its human load against the ground. Others fired with muskets and pistols, and another hurled down a great, smoking can. It flew over Kildare's head and exploded as it struck the ground, with a force that almost lifted Kildare from his grasp on the ladder.

He looked down and saw that every man below him had been knocked from place. A smoke cloud stifled him. Through it he could see the still bodies of the dead, and that those who were not yet emptied of life were writhing. A legless horror caught hold of the bottom rungs of the ladder, and, with a knife between his teeth, began to haul his lightened body upwards.

ANOTHER grenade was poised by a cheering Spaniard above, but the hurled javelin of Luis drove right through the man's body, the dripping steel standing well out behind the back. That soldier, in falling, dropped the live grenade on top of the wall. Another Spaniard, seeing the danger, caught up the smoking pot to hurl it among the buccaneers, but it exploded in his hands.

That was how the top of the wall was cleared for Kildare and his two companions. And as they stood on the crest of the rampart, Kildare wondered how any others, unless they had been similarly aided by chance, could have come to touch with the enemy. Already, however, he saw groups of the pirates, here and there, mastering different points of the wall, hurling the defenders into the inner yard, and clambering down to push home the assault.

Kildare was instantly among them. He saw Luis put his foot on the breast of the dead Spaniard, at the base of the wall, and tug out his javelin. He saw Pierre Chaptal pick up and kindle the fuse of a grenade which he tossed through a lower casement of Castle Gloria. With the explosion there was a great outburst of smoke and a frightful screaming through the window.

Everywhere, the defenders were running to gain the main building of the castle; everywhere they were being cut down as they ran. Only at the main entrance in the main hall was there a resolute kernel of defense that laid low the entering buccaneers in heaps. Kildare made for that spot.

A pistol exploded close to his head, the bullet barely skimming his cheek. It had been fired from behind him. And, turning, he had a glimpse of the contorted, dark face of Tranquillo, through the smoke. But there was no chance to get at him now. The press of the attack was too great to repay that act of treason on the spot.

Like swirling water, the wave of fighters burst in through the entrance, and Kildare saw through the uproar, as through a smoke, the noble form and face of the governor, rallying the

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last of his men. There were hardly half a dozen of them at his side.

A woman—his wife perhaps—and a small girl were plucking at his sleeve, no doubt begging him to surrender. But they might as well have tried to influence an iron statue. The point of his sword resting on the pavement, his hands folded on the weapon's hilt, he waited silently for the next attack. Blood was flowing from his head, but his face was white and calm.

With one glance at the man Kildare knew how Spanish metal had conquered the New World, north and south.

"Hold back from him, men!" shouted Kildare. "He's worth ten thousand pieces, living—and not a penny dead!"

BUT yonder strode Tranquillo, waving a sword in his hand and calling the pack behind him. The irresistible desire to kill brought the whole mob on in a wave. It closed around the last of the defenders, and they went down. Only the noble head and the laboring sword of the governor appeared for a moment. Then the wave closed over him, also, and Kildare turned hastily away.

His clothes had been half burned, half blown from him in the assault. Powder stains and burns blackened him. He looked now even more the ragged scarecrow than when he had stood in the cattle market of Porto Bello, before the crowd. But he went on, fiercely, eagerly, with Luis striding constantly at his side.

In the yard they passed a group of a dozen Englishmen who had been taken out of a cellar of the "castle." They had been prisoners since the Spaniards, by treachery, had captured Providence, two years before. The scars of old floggings, and the blood-stains of recent ones, were written upon their back. And now they were flinging up their arms in a madness of joy over their rescue. With their starved, shaggy faces, they had the look of bestial gods of the forest, but of happiness, too.

Many others were before Kildare and Luis, in making toward the town. Singly or in clusters, the men of the sea rushed down upon the unhappy city. They were searching houses, gathering booty, dragging prisoners into the street. Brandy kegs were placed here and there, to be tasted by any who passed; more kegs of wine and rum were being rolled out to the gutters by shouting companions.

An uproar of triumph was all out of the throats of men; the wail of defeat seemed to be altogether out of the throats of women. And Kildare broke into a swift and desperate run, heading straight for the house of Larreta.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A PAIR OF CAPTIVES.

IT was the rich quarter of the town. The size of the houses advertised its wealth. And at the doors, or through the windows—everywhere—the buccaneers were forcing an entrance against a feeble resistance. Only inside of the door of the Larreta house there seemed to be fighting men. Of the half-dozen ruffians who were in front of the house, one was already kicking in the dust, embracing his wounded body with both arms. The other five alternately beat at the door with clubs and axes, or dodged as bullets were fired through the door. That door went reeling inward with a crash, as Kildare and the Indian came up.

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Out of the dimness a volley met the inrushing buccaneers. It made one leap back in fear; it toppled another against the side of the door. Only three men charged home, through the shadows of that hall. And Kildare, following fast, saw one of them drive the whole length of a cutlass into the body of old Larreta. The Spaniard fell without making a sound; but another buccaneer was promptly pistoled in retaliation by tall young Pedro Alvarado.

That left a mere pair, of whom one was that formidable, bald-headed fellow who had fought at Kildare's side before this. And perhaps Alvarado would have stood his ground against two; but when he saw another pair coming, Kildare and Luis, he turned and fled up the great stairway, disappearing into the upper part of the house.

Kildare followed, keen as a hound. He could guess where Alvarado would make his last stand. But even before him, the bald-headed pirate with the two dancing pigtails came to the door of the room occupied by Ines Heredia.

One blow of the ax in his hands split the door from top to bottom. Alvarado, shouting and desperate, sprang at the fellow with a thrust of his sword. But the weapon was beaten from his hands by a sway of the ax; and the weight of the latter, glancing against Alvarado's head, flung him stunned against the wall, and then let him slump against the floor.

Ines Heredia had been trying to unbar the shutters of the window, to escape in that manner onto the roof. But there was no time now, she saw, for flight. She drew back, throwing out one hand toward the fallen body of Alvarado, and calling out his name. The thin gleam of a stiletto was in her other hand. She was dressed like a serving girl, in gray woollen; but to Kildare she looked like the queen of the world.

"Drop the knife, lass!" cried the bald-headed buccaneer. "Would you be spoiling fine goods that by rights belong to me?"

And he tapped her across the wrist with the handle of his ax, so that the stiletto flew out of her grasp and tinkled against the farther wall.

All of this had happened in two gestures, as the door was burst open. Now Kildare ventured a glance over his shoulder, and saw Luis's wide shoulders and the grinning face of the other buccaneer, pressing eagerly forward.

"Throw this one down the stairway, Luis," said Kildare. "I'll handle the other."

HE saw the great hands of Luis reach for the second pirate, and, turning again, he beheld the bald-headed ruffian resting a hand against the wall, on either side of the girl. She stood as straight as though bound to the stake, but her eyes held unwaveringly upon the brutal face before her. She had not uttered a sound, except to cry out the name of Pedro Alvarado, as he fell.

Kildare pricked the buccaneer no deeper than a wasp sting, between the shoulder-blades. The monster swung his head and roared:

"Captain or no captain, this loot is my loot! Go fill your hands in another place, for that's the law and the order!"

Then his voice burst out in frenzy, "Hell take you out of my way!"

He swung about, the huge bit of his ax flashing in an arc; but as Kildare's feet flicked in and out, like those of a dancer, the great ax went slithering and clanking across the floor. The buccaneer dropped to one knee, gasping:

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"Mother of God!—And to die for a wench . . . !"

He spilled heavily over on one side. His great body was loosened and melted against the stones by death.

The girl had not moved; except that her eyes watched Kildare, now, instead of that fallen man.

"I've come for you," said Kildare. "But go to your man, first, and see if he's dead, or only stunned."

She was beside Pedro Alvarado in an instant, pressing his head to her breast, mourning over him for an instant, and then looking up suddenly with a joy that was as pale as the horror of death.

In that brief moment, Kildare, like a deft portrait painter, drew that face imperishably in his mind's eye.

He saw Alvarado stir and sit up, then groaning. Big Luis stood in the shattered doorway, panting, his eyes flickering with the uneasy light of battle.

"Bring a rope," said Kildare, "and tie the pair of 'em by their necks, together."

Luis vanished. He was back again by the time that Alvarado staggered to his feet, his yellow hair a tangled cloud about his head, and a thin trickle of blood running down his face.

"By their necks," said Kildare to Luis. "And leave a free length of the rope so that you can lead them along."

Luis began to laugh. Something in this seemed to touch the very core of comedy in him. And still he laughed and laughed, as he fitted the rope in two nooses around the necks of the pair.

ALVARADO, as his wits cleared, realized who was standing before him. He cried out:

"Señor Kildare—noble captain!—God reward you for saving her. My own life is nothing.—Ines, no matter what hell is eating out the heart of Porto Bello, this man is strong enough to save you."

"You Spaniards," said Kildare, "have taught us how to turn murder loose, and some of it is running through the streets now. But as for reward, I reward myself in this life, Señor Alvarado. Tell me—do you love this wench in the gray dress?"

"She is more than heart and soul to me!" cried Alvarado, earnestly.

"Do you," said Kildare to the girl, "love this handsome lad with the yellow hair?"

She was silent.

Kildare stepped to her, took her by the chin, and forced back her head a little.

"Answer me!" he said. "You little fool, do you think that you'll bring him into danger if you tell me the truth? I saw you maundering over him, when you thought he was dead. But answer me with your own voice, and perhaps I can get the two of you clear of the town.—Do you love him?"

She closed her eyes. With his fingers he could feel her trembling.

"I do," said the girl.

Kildare dropped his hand then, and stood back from her.

"There's the end of a great design!" he said. "The English blood in you was worthy of it, but the Spanish stifles me. You and I could have made a story for men to remember.—Instead of that I must lead you out like a pair of slaves, and turn you loose in the forest.—Mind you, if the men of Henry Morgan thought that I was setting you free they'd have you away from me instantly. You must continue to look like miserable captives. Alvarado, smear the blood over your

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face, and wipe your reddened hands on her dress. Ines, tousle your hair and let it hang wild. Tear your dress. You must look the part of a slave, or by heaven you may be one before the darkness begins!—Take the rope, Luis, and lead them down."

He himself went before. He heard their voices speaking behind him, but the beating of his own pulses drowned out the sound of the words and made all obscure. In the hallway he heard her exclaim at the sight of Larreta, stretched on the floor. She would have paused, but Luis wrenched cruelly on the rope, and dragged them away. And Kildare left the Indian's harshness unreprimanded.

They came out into the street, to see that the sun was setting behind the Iron Castle, at the harbor's mouth; and past that castle, which lay black and silent against the glow of the West, the sails of many ships were blowing. It was the fleet which Morgan had left behind, and which was now brought up by those who had been left to man it. It might have been blown out of the water by the guns of the Iron Castle, but perhaps that garrison had fled when the Gloria was taken. At any rate, all of Porto Bello lay helplessly in the hands of the buccaneers, and the guns of the incoming fleet boomed out a salute to the victory. All the bells of the town were set a-jangling in answer.

THE sacking of the town was in full progress. Movables of all sorts were being dragged out of doors or flung from windows into the streets. Already the bloodstained buccaneers, drunk with wine and strong brandy, had made themselves still more fantastic to the eye with their stolen finery. And while some of them plundered the houses, others were torturing women and men, to make them confess into what corners and holes their treasure had been tucked; into what wells and cisterns their precious possessions had been dropped.

Kildare and his troop passed an old man who was hung up by the thumbs, from the lintel of his own doorway, while one drunken brute applied fire to his feet and another shook him by the beard and shouted questions at him.

Kildare looked back and saw that the girl carried her head high, walked steadily on, and had about her something so detached and superior to any earthly wretchedness that the dishevelled hair and the common gray robe, torn as it was, could hardly meet his eye, such was his sense of her.—Or perhaps, as she saw the ruin of the town, the English blood in her may have whispered the story of all the towns which the Spaniards had smitten and the millions of dead Indians that had been swept from the New World.

A sudden outcry before them—the beating of hoofs—announced something of importance. If there had been any by-lane Kildare would have turned his prisoners down it; but the way was walled solidly on both sides. He had to march on, merely swinging to one side when a triumphal procession turned the corner and came on toward them. In the lead ran a score of Negroes; poor slaves rejoicing in the downfall of their masters, and hardly caring what new misery came to them tomorrow, so long as there might be suffering for the Spaniards to-day.

Behind them stormed along a dozen or so of the buccaneers who had given over, half-finished, the pleasures of the sack in order to accompany two of their leaders. These two, of course, were Henry Morgan himself and Cap-

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tain Tranquillo, both mounted on mules.

Captain Henry Morgan rode with the ape on his shoulder, which made his silhouette a monstrous thing; and at his knee there was a great jug of rum, which he raised to his lips now and then. Captain Tranquillo was content with a flask of brandy.

Both drank freely as they passed along, and as they went the buccaneers turned from the plundering of Porto Bello to cheer the most valiant and lucky of captains.

"The Englishman!" shouted Tranquillo. "Look, Morgan! The Englishman—and he has *two* prisoners instead of one.—Take one of 'em away from him, if you're a man!"

Captain Morgan stopped his mule and the whole procession stopped with him. The Negroes spilled around Kildare and his three companions. He heard Morgan saying slowly, loudly: "I would stop God in heaven if I chose and take the lightning out of His hand. So why should I not stop one damned, starved Englishman?"

CHAPTER XXIV.

A THIN BIRD.

KILDARE stood there with the two captives close beside him, and he muttered to the girl:

"I have the oath of Morgan to take but one prisoner out of Porto Bello. Not two."

"Then take Pedro Alvarado!" whispered the girl.

"No!" said Alvarado, who had heard.

"Silence, swine!" said Kildare, into the noble face of the young Spaniard.

He walked straight forward to Henry Morgan.

"Do you want my reason for taking two instead of one?" he demanded.

"So!—You've come to reason with me, have you?" said Henry Morgan. "I'll teach you to reason, you scarecrow—you dancing-master!"

"Good!" shouted Tranquillo. "A damned, scrawny, mincing dancing-master."

"If I were not in a hurry," said Kildare, calmly, "I'd take you out of your saddle, Tranquillo, and tie your hands. I'd whip you like a dog of a black slave!"

"If I were not in a hurry," said Tranquillo, in a thundering fury, "I would stop to chop you up with a sword. But instead, I'll use a pistol!"

He cast away his flask of brandy and hauled out a pair of pistols. But Henry Morgan exclaimed:

"Put down the guns, Tranquillo. This fellow stole your name from you once, and he may steal it again. Have numbers on your side before you fight with him.—But who talks of fighting when Captain Henry Morgan is near?—Tell me, Kildare, you fool—are you talking of fighting?"

At once Jimmy Green caught the note of anger in its master's voice and began to jump up and down on the buccaneer's shoulder, gibbering and squeaking and shaking a diminutive fist at Kildare.

"Why should I talk of fighting?" said Kildare. "Walking is the easier way—and I'll walk on with my pair. I brought you Juan Capote, Morgan, and when you roasted him you owed me another prisoner."

"I owe you another for the amusing noise that Juan Capote made," said Morgan, suddenly laughing. "By heaven, there was plenty of music to be squeezed out of him—and I think I got most of the tunes! I owe you another,

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so take the pair of them. *Ha!* Kildare, I saw you on the ladder, with the hair blown off the back of your head, and your friends knocked out from under your feet, but still climbing. Take your two prisoners—take your twenty!"

He waved his jug amiably and a quantity of the rum leaped from the lips of the vessel into the air, making a flash of rosy gold in the sunset.

"Take half the town!" shouted Henry Morgan. "When Henry Morgan denies a few score Spanish rats to a hero, call me pig and throw swill in my face!"

Kildare waved his hand and turned back to the waiting trio, and he heard Tranquillo saying:

"All right, Morgan. Let him take the life of the town and the light of it—and leave you the empty house and the darkness. He's taken the angel out of this heaven, or I'm a blind man."

"Is she beautiful?" demanded Morgan. "Let me see her!—She *is* beautiful, by heaven! Look at me!—Wait a moment, Kildare.—Look at me, sweetheart, and tell me if you could love Henry Morgan?"

HE swung down from the mule and stalked over to the girl.

Pedro Alvarado dropped his head with a groan as Morgan stood over the girl, roaring out:

"Tell me, my golden lamb—has this brute of a Kildare dared to put hands on you, and blood on your dress and fear in your heart? Tell me, sweetheart—could you love a man who is going to sweep the Spanish Main from coast to coast, and heap up silver and enough gold to bury you in?"

"If only she would bow her head—or scream out in fear!" thought Kildare.

But her head remained higher than ever, and her eye was totally undaunted.

"Speak to me, you fool! Has he cut out your tongue?" roared Morgan suddenly. "Ah, if you don't speak, you'll talk mute language, perhaps.—Kiss me, my beautiful!"

He caught her in his bloodstained arms, putting a hand behind her head as he leaned to kiss her white face. Kildare moaned like a dying man, and struck Morgan away with his fist.

The instant his knuckles struck the flesh he knew that he had done wrong. He was sure of it, as Morgan reeled back a step and stood with a hand laid against his bruised face.

"I foul your girl when I touch her with my chimney-sweep hands, do I?" said Henry Morgan, thunderously.

He made a gesture to the excited Negroes.

"Take him!" he cried.

They were like a score of black dogs, eagerly leaping. Kildare was instantly helpless. Luis, also, they almost pulled down, though he managed to fling them away from him for a moment, and then run like a great, tawny mountain lion across the road and leap a wall. Tranquillo took a flying shot at the Indian, but when the Negroes clambered over the wall there was no sign of the man.

"He's too big to be lost for long," said Henry Morgan. "We'll find him again, and fry him in the same pan! He may furnish the grease for the cooking of this goose, his master, eh?"

"This is your day, captain," said Tranquillo. "You can't be wrong on this day of days!"

"That's a true thing also," said Morgan. "Now, Kildare, watch me. Look at me carefully.—Do you see? I take her in my arms, gently and slowly, so that my hands can taste the

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softness of her flesh. And I bend back her lovely face—thus. Do you see, Kildare?"

"God—strike me blind!" cried out Kildare.

"AH—ah!" murmured Morgan, rolling his head from side to side. "Tell me what you think, Tranquillo? Does he love her? Do I give a damn who thumbs my mistress? No, for I know that she's a twice-read page. But for my wife—for my wife — that's a different matter. — Tell me, sweet blue eyes—my beautiful heart—would he have married you like an honorable gentleman? If you'll not speak to me, kiss me then, my heart! Kiss Captain Henry Morgan!"

He leaned over until his face touched hers.

"I might wait for you, too," said Henry Morgan, "and I might even wait a day or two—until a few bowls of punch have ripened you. But I'll harvest you, sweetheart, when you blush for me like a flower in the field. Do you hear me, Tranquillo? I talk like a damned poet—a damned, stale, stinking poet.—Come on with them! I wish we had the Indian, too, though. He had legs long enough to jump like a grasshopper, and I have ways to make 'em spring high, Tranquillo.—Oh, I have plenty of ways!"

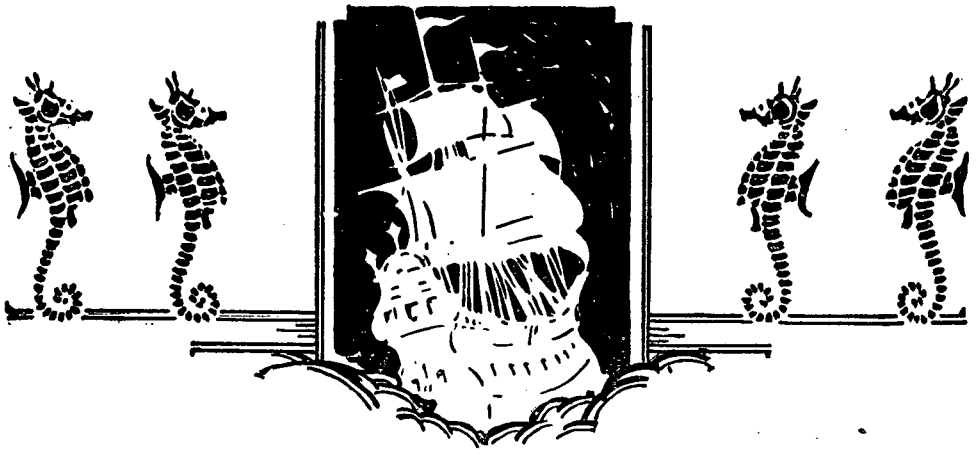
Jimmy Green turned on his master's shoulders and began to make threatening gestures toward Kildare. But Kildare hardly marked them. The spirit seemed to have gone out of him at last. And in an instant, with the flight of his hope, all his strength left him.

The Negroes poked his lean body with their fingers and laughed; they called him a thin bird that would take only a short roasting. Then he heard the voice of Pedro Alvarado saying:

"It was for my sake, *señor*. And I know that to you I am more of an enemy than even my race makes me. Now we are lost together, and whatever cruelty these devils may find to use on us we shall help one another to die like men, and—

His voice died in his throat. For suddenly he saw that Kildare's head had fallen back on his shoulders, as though he were already dying of fear or despair. The Englishman's head rolled from side to side, and with every step that he made a groan came up out of his throat.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.



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Your Horoscope

Those who have received horoscope readings from Miss Carter will find a number of sections explained below. Readings including all of your own planetary positions will appear weekly in the next few issues of ARGOSY.

Section 239. Mars.

THIS planetary position adds to impatience and restlessness, but it is quite beneficial to the mentality, giving keenness and quicker reaction to impression. You probably have nimble wit and some tendency toward sarcasm. Unless there are very contrary testimonies in your chart, you are apt to grow dissatisfied and desire many changes of occupation or residence. Conservative, patient birth sign influence of the sun and other planets could greatly lessen these tendencies. The vibration is considered by astrologers to indicate the possibility of some marital disharmony unless these restless tendencies are controlled. It is not at all unusual for the quick-thinking people under this influence to talk very rapidly, even faster than physical operation permits.

Section 208. Moon.

THE moon in this sign adds to the aggressive and forceful qualities. Astrologers consider, however, that the sign and planet are not wholly harmonious and that in such close relationship, they are likely to make the individual abrupt, critical, and somewhat inclined to be revengeful. The qualities are usually an aid to the realization of ambition, however, if controlled and properly directed. Their danger lies in the fact that they may become too greatly a part of your outward manner. The influence is to be regarded as a fortunate one if your sun reading states that you might lack aggressiveness. Those who were born in very militant, aggressive birth signs, however, should guard against becoming intolerant and quarrelsome. Very few people born at a time when this sign is operating strongly are lacking in ambition.

Section 214. Mercury.

THIS zodiacal sign imparts, more than any other, the qualities of persistence, the ability to continue despite every discouragement and difficulty. Mercury exerts its effect, according to astrological belief, principally upon the mind. You would, consequently, be much slower to decide than would otherwise have been the case, but the combined vibrations would have made you much more inflexible when once you have come to a decision. It is considered a fortunate position for the acquisition of money, increasing the fondness for money so that the individual affected is much more likely to attain financial independence than are others. It is, however, a position which is generally considered to lessen any tendency shown elsewhere in the chart toward extensive traveling. It increases any trait of irritability, but is a very favorable influence upon the memory.

Section 284. Neptune.

THIS planetary position, according to astrologers of old, adds to the capacity for intellectual development. It is probable that you are more brilliant mentally than you would have been without its influence, but that you have some tendency to scatter your energies. The vibration adds inspiration, mental alertness and versatility. Those born when this influence was strongly active are likely to be subject to fits of despondency. You are probably intrigued by occult phenomena even though your interest in spiritualism may never have gone past the casual stage. It also adds to the interest in literary matters and, providing other influences in the chart are of a harmonious nature, it would have imparted literary ability. The extent to which that ability is developed depends almost entirely upon early environment and advantages, however.

Section 231. Venus.

THE planetary position which this section considers is one which would increase the kindliness and sympathy of the individual to a marked degree. Venus is very strong in this zodiacal sign and you should have qualities which would make you quite popular. Astrological lore says it would have greatly added to your love of music, poetry and artistic things in general. It is a very fortunate position for friendship and also for love and marriage. Ancient astrologers would have said it indicates a probability of success and good fortune either directly or indirectly through marriage or through partnership and association with others in some way. It is more than likely that beauty and harmony are very necessary to your peace of mind and you are by nature careful of your surroundings. You would dislike familiarity in your associates, not allowing them to take liberties.

Section 253. Neptune.

THIS would have greatly added to your romantic, responsive, enthusiastic and emotional qualities. While probably not irreligious, you would certainly not be inclined to be devout or ecclesiastical. Astrologers consider that the position bestows quite practical ideas in worldly affairs. Many of the greatest advances in mechanical, commercial and building lines have been made through those strongly influenced by this sign. On the other hand, generations coming into the world when this influence was operating have been responsible for several artistically creative waves. The position would have given you creative ideas and the practical ability to execute them.

Section 277. Uranus.

THIS vibration would have added to your ability to concentrate and increased your power of will, but it would also have made you impatient of delay and fretful under restraint. It has always been considered favorable to the qualities useful in scientific investigation. Not a few of the world's greatest scientists were born under its influence but of course, its effectiveness depends upon early environment and opportunity to a great extent. The sign studied in this section is very much in harmony with this planet, strengthening other favorable testimonies in your chart and intensifying the best qualities imparted by other planets. You should try to see that your ability to concentrate effectively is not lessened by the impatience imparted by this position. You should cultivate deliberation, according to astrological rules.

Section 209. Moon.

THE moon is likely to be negative and passive in its influence; but in this sign it has many strong characteristics and the vibrations are considered very positive. Astrologers consider it to be a "double-bodied" sign, likely to bring about varied or even dual experience and nature. It is quite likely that you are not always able to thoroughly understand your own emotions and reactions. You would have the faculty of concentrating on one thing at a time. Emotion would not cloud your judgment. The clearest as well as the coldest intelligences among outstanding people of history were born under this particular planetary position. It is likely that you are very much inclined to be prophetic.

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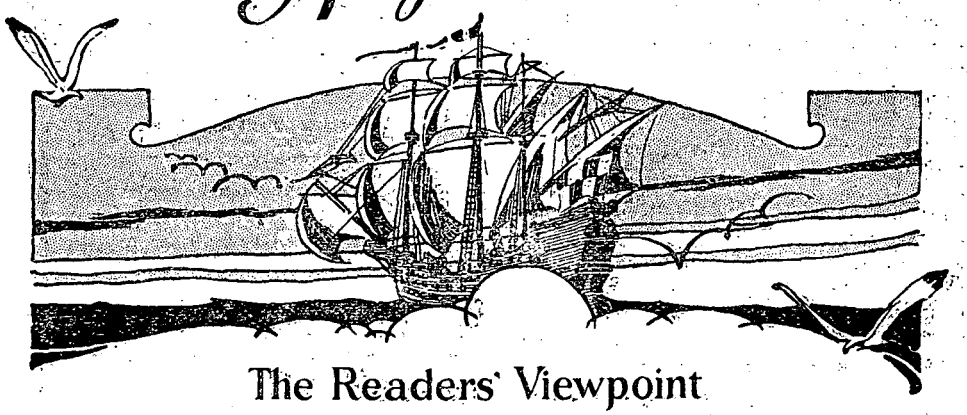
Argonotes



The Readers' Viewpoint

ARGOSY pays $1 for each letter printed. Send your letter to "Argonotes" Editor, ARGOSY, 280 Broadway, N. Y. C.

OPERA and concert star—and ARGOSY fan:

Connersville, Ind.

The following incident occurred several years ago, but it did not occur to me until recently that it might be of interest to you.

One morning a lady walked into my store and when I came forward to wait on her I was surprised and delighted to recognize Madame Schumann-Heink. I introduced myself and asked permission to introduce my clerks. She was most gracious, and after chatting for a few moments I asked her what she wished, and she purchased a copy of ARGOSY and told me she was a constant reader of ARGOSY, showing me very clearly that she is a regular fellow.

C. M. SPICELY.

MORE information about "steel-jacketed bullets.":

Philadelphia, Penn.

Although there are steel-jacketed bullets, the use of the expression, especially in this country, is usually a misnomer. It is evident that Mr. Wirt is not as careful about details as he claims, or he would not have stated so definitely in his letter, "that there is no such thing as a 'steel-jacketed bullet.'"

Jacketing—as Mr. Wirt explained—is necessary (when muzzle velocities exceed 2,000 f. s.), to prevent "stripping." Jacketed bullets are divided into two kinds: full jacketed bullets being completely encased in the jacket, and soft point bullets arranged so that they mushroom upon impact. Practically all military bullets are of the former type, while the latter are used for the big game shooting.

In the United States such bullets have a lead alloy core and a thin envelope of either copper, cupro-nickel (copper 60%, nickel 40%), gilding metal (copper 90%, zinc 10%), or Lubaloy (copper 90%, zinc 9%, tin 1%). Of these, the most successful appears to be the Lubaloy coating, with gilding metal a very close second. Cupro-nickel bullet jackets give serious metal fouling when used with a velocity of 2,100 f. s. or more. Our present service ammunition, caliber .30, M1, has a 172-grain boat-tail bullet with a gilding metal jacket.

No American bullets have been made with steel-jackets except experimentally, but many German and other European makes of bullets have jackets of mild steel. This type of jacketing causes friction and will wear out a barrel very quickly. Recently, however, these manufacturers are turning to gilding metal and it is likely they will change entirely.

Our Army uses armor-piercing cartridges for anti-tank and anti-aircraft firing. These bullets have a solid tungsten-steel core with a gilding metal jacket and a soft point to prevent slipping on armor plate. Other nations have similar ammunition. During the latter part of the war, the Germans made their caliber 7.9 mm. cartridges with drawn steel copper washed bullets. I have also heard of wealthy sportsmen using steel core bullets in large caliber elephant guns, but believe these were made to order.

GEORGE A. WISWELL, JR.

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A MUCH-USED magazine:

Los Angeles, Calif.

My starting to read the ARGOSY goes back to about 1912 when Edgar Rice Burroughs came out with "Tarzan of the Apes," and I do not believe that there has been a week since that the ARGOSY has not been in my home. I not only read it, but my husband reads it and my son and daughter read it and then our relations borrow it and they also read it, so we sure get our money's worth out of each ARGOSY My favorites are Edgar Rice Burroughs, William MacLeod Raine, Brand, Tuttle, Brent, Gardner, in their Western stories; J. D. Newsom in his military and Foreign Legion stories. Some of my favorite characters are *Tarzan, John Solomon, Gillian Hazeltine, Hashknife* and *Sleepy, Mme. Storey.* I forgot that I also like Fred MacIsaac, he is a good writer. I enjoy reading what the "Argonotes" have to say.

MRS. WILLIE A. KIMBROUGH.

LUCKY devils:

Pelican Lake, Wis.

After reading all those thrillers in the ARGOSY I decided it was high time I started pushing my pen around to tell you just how much I like 'em. Fred MacIsaac is my favorite. I thought his "Lost Land of Atzlan" just about "what the doctor ordered." It keeps him humping, though, to keep ahead of Max Brand and Theodore Roscoe. You'll be likely to hear from me again if you ever dare think of dropping Walt Coburn or J. Allan Dunn. The serials are my meat, but I'd sure feel gypped if I didn't get my full quota of short stories.

I've been reading the letters of some of the other readers, lucky devils. Here they have been reading the ARGOSY for years and I just found out about it six months ago. A friend of mine saved up all the copies for a year and gave them to me in one bunch—now I ask you wasn't that a real friend?

KEN BERDAN.

TWO mishaps:

San Anselmo, Calif.

ARGOSY is a real ship as she is always looking ahead—looking for treasures that are certain to give pleasure to her varied crew of passengers. So far she has traveled a remarkably accurate course during her fifty years. As I look back on the past year's sailing, I see that the good ship ARGOSY has only had two slight mishaps—when she bumped into W. Wirt and Ralph R. Perry. In order to obtain such cargo her pilots surely must have veered from the right course or must have become lost in a fog or storm.

On the other hand, ARGOSY has rediscovered some valuable treasure routes that have been closed for several years which lead to the writings of such authors as Max Brand, Karl Detzer, T. S. Stribling, Walt Coburn, and William MacLeod Raine. Of course I am expecting her to continue on her well-established routes during the coming year, picking up the cargoes of MacIsaac, Merritt, Packard, Kline, Burroughs, Mason, Worts, and other such worthy authors when they have their treasures ready to ship on board. May ARGOSY continue to have fair sailing during 1934!

Respectfully,

LLOYD KRELLE.

COVER artists, pro and con:

Martinsburg, W. Va.

I would like to congratulate ARGOSY on its splendid staff of illustrators. Paul Stahr is inimitable, and C. Calvert's illustration of Roscoe's "Last Minute" is a masterpiece, giving us a vivid picture of the emotions of a pilot riding his crippled plane to earth.

GARNETT L. BROWN.

Smackover, Ark.

You've played the dickens now. I have a complete file of ARGOSY in my library, and save them each week. The picture illustrating "Last Minute" is so hideous that I cannot place this number in the files, and I do not like to remove the cover.

What would you do in a case of that sort?

B. W. BARNES,
Editor, The Smackover *Journal.*

Bronx, N. Y.

Keep Paul Stahr as cover designer. His covers are better than Calvert's or Graef's. I have just one complaint: Keep true story features such as Stookie Allen's out of ARGOSY. Another thing, I wish you would go back to the old form of serials. One starting and ending each week. What became of Kenneth Perkins and Robert Carse?

WILLIAM LIEBERMAN.

VOYAGE:

Boston, Mass.

I have written the following poem to describe the successful voyage of the ship ARGOSY:

'Mid turb'lent gales that stir up all the seas,
Full many a craft attempts the briny main,
But only one proceeds as 'twere a breeze
That wafted it, instead of beating rain.
All others shake with shouts of men and strain
Of creaking cordage, but the ARGOSY
Alone the welcoming harbor's cheer can gain,
Majestic, stands above the waves, as free
As those proud barks which reached these shores
of Liberty.

Her decks uphold a strong and gallant crew,
A captain great, well versed in his art,
Who but the best of cargo will review;
The mate, MacIsaac, stirs the sailors' heart

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With tales of bravery and of men alert.
Burroughs and Kline in fierce contention vie
With tales of many a far-distant mart
Where heroes battle; and about the sky
And of the many worlds that all throughout it fly.

For fifty years the sturdy ship has sailed:
The captain changes and the sailors change,
But balmy zephyrs never yet have failed
To cause this bark incessantly to range
From north to south and into countries strange.
It takes the magic things of every land,
These careful mariners will soon arrange
Delightfully on e'en the farthest strand;
Thus merrily moves on this ever-joyful band!

JOSEPH W. MCCARTHY.

Looking Ahead!

Brother of the Cheyennes

Born white and raised an Indian, red-headed Rusty Sabin wages a strange feud with the army major commanding a frontier post. A novel by

Max Brand

The Ivory Casket

It spells disaster to the schemes of Major Brane, free-lance of the Orient. A novelette by

Erle Stanley Gardner

Article 246

An African sultan's skull puts diplomats, Legionnaires, and detectives in an uproar. A novelette by

Theodore Roscoe

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28x4.75-19	2.45	.95
29x4.75-20	2.50	.95
29x5.00-19	2.85	1.05
30x5.00-20	2.85	1.05
28x5.25-18	2.90	1.15
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.15
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.15
31x5.25-21	3.25	1.15
28x5.50-18	3.35	1.15
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.15
30x6.00-18	3.40	1.15
31x6.00-19	3.40	1.15
32x6.00-20	3.45	1.25
33x7.00-21	3.65	1.25
32x6.50-20	3.75	1.35

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33x4	2.95	.85
34x4	3.25	.85
32x4½	3.35	1.15
33x4½	3.45	1.15
34x4½	3.45	1.15
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33x5	3.75	1.45
35x5	3.95	1.55

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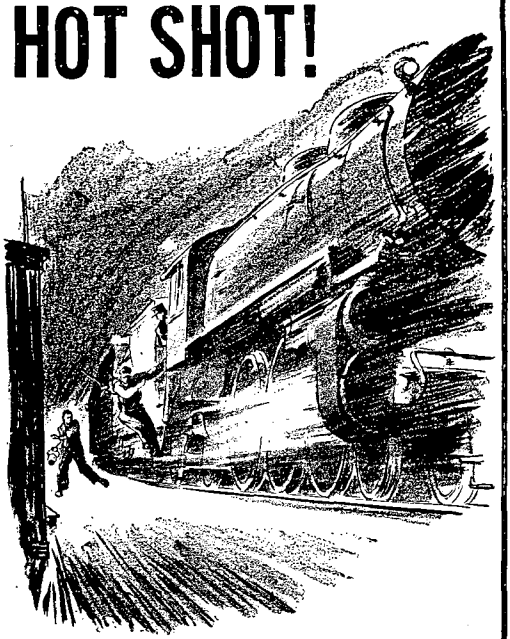

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